A STEPSON OF FORTUNE

HENRY MURRAY


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A STEPSON OF FORTUNE

THE MEMORIES, CONFESSIONS, AND OPINIONS

OF

HENRY MURRAY

II

" All, the plain saw me gather, I garland—
The flowers and the weeds."

BROWNING.

THE BAKER & TAYLOR COMPANY
NEW YORK
1910

TO

MY WIFE—

IN FAME, MEA TABERNA,
IN NOCTE, MEA LUCERNA,
RECTA ME SEMPER GUBERNA—

I DEDICATE THIS IMPERFECT RECORD
OF A MOST IMPERFECT LIFE

LONDON: *March*, 1909.

A STEPSON OF FORTUNE

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE prefaced one of his earlier volumes by the statement that it was the work of the obscurest man of letters in America. I will preface this volume by saying that it is the work of the unluckiest scribbler—regarded merely as a scribbler—on which the all-beholding eye of day has ever looked. That is the one statement this book will contain to which I will suffer no challenge. It is my one point of pride—perhaps, of vanity—on which I would quarrel with my dearest friend or the wife of my bosom. You and I will come to no good of each other's society unless that fact is accepted *as* a fact.

Many quite intelligent people will tell us that there is no such factor as luck in human affairs, and a scientist of very distinguished ability, Lord Avebury, once wrote a whole book to prove that belief the correct one. I have not read the book, but I am quite certain that his lordship might have put his ink to better uses. So far from there being no such force in human affairs as luck, it is an absolute fact that luck is the one force that directs them. Since a man does not choose the race he shall be born of, it is a matter of luck whether he comes into the world a white man or a nigger. Since he does not select his parents it

is luck whether his father is a duke or a dustman, and whether he is the product of well-fed, well-aerated, healthy people, or of the refuse of humanity, rotten with accumulations of inherited disease. It is luck whether he is born with the intellectual equipment which makes the man of genius or the absolute lack of such equipment, which makes the microcephalous idiot. It is luck whether, being a man of genius, he is born in circumstances which will encourage, or even permit, the development of his genius, whether, to start with, he is, or is not, taught to read and write. That superior intelligence will make itself obvious in some direction or other is pretty certain, but it is luck which decides the direction. The circumstances of their birth and training made Shakespeare a great poet and Raffael a great painter. Born in and surrounded by other circumstances they might have been highly adroit pickpockets or burglars. When the chance of administering his famous "whiff of grapeshot" came to Napoleon, he was bargaining for the purchase of a furniture shop in the Rue St. Honoré; had the chance not come, the conqueror of Europe might have made a successful tradesman and an excellent Maire of Paris, and have long since been forgotten. In all his battles he was only twice slightly wounded, but where is our certainty that, while he kept his legs, men as able as he did not leave their bones under the waters of the Beresina or the sands of Syria? Looking on the prodigious prodigal waste of Nature, remembering that—

"Of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear,"

and that she has no more care for the individual human than for the individual herb or insect, what surety can we have that she has not flung as rubbish to the void treasures of potential genius a thousand times as great as those she has suffered to reveal themselves ?

I will produce the proofs of the vainglorious assertion made above in their proper place and time. Meanwhile, let me begin my autobiography in correct fashion—at the beginning.

I do not willingly approach the history of my childhood, nor shall I dwell long upon it. For many years past it has been my habit, when any childish memory has intruded itself upon my mind, to dismiss the entire period and all connected with it with the heartiest curse in my repertory, and make haste to think of something else. From this the reader will conclude that my childhood was not a happy time, and he will be right in so concluding. But it is only of late years that I have come to recognise how unhappy it really was.

I am the youngest born of a family of twelve or thirteen—I don't really know which, and it doesn't greatly matter. Now, to be the Benjamin of a big family is popularly supposed to be an enviable lot. So, in given circumstances, it may be, but such circumstances were not those into which I was born. My parents were getting elderly, my father was then fifty-seven, and my mother some years younger, and they had reached those ages through a long and dreary pilgrimage of failure and poverty which had soured their tempers and embittered

their natures. In common justice to their memories I must make the admission that I am the only one of their surviving children who does not remember them with affection and respect. Whether or not, at about the period of my birth, the family circumstances had undergone some peculiar change for the worse I do not know enough of the family history to say. But the fact as I know it is, that when I made my appearance, whatever may have been the condition of the real, objective larder, the spiritual cupboard from which the spiritual milk and bread had been—I suppose—copiously administered to my brothers and sisters, was bare. I do not remember any time of my childhood when a sense of wrong, oppression, and injustice was not a part of my being. I do not know what age I may have had when it became a determined and indisputable dogma with my parents that I was an altogether lost and abandoned criminal, but I do know that that was the hypothesis on which they acted towards me. I do not remember that, on the occasion of any one of those innumerable little squabbles which inevitably happen among all children, an appeal to parental authority ever resulted in anything but my getting the worst of it, and pretty generally a hiding into the bargain. On one occasion, my father being in a brown study, and I sitting reading beside him, a plate fell off a shelf, and my father gave me a cuff on the side of the head which left me stunned and dazed for an hour after. The proceeding looks perhaps a little arbitrary and illogical, but it was really beautifully simple. My father was annoyed, he did not pause to inquire

into the nature of the annoyance, I, the incarnate principle of evil, being there in actual presence beside him, must have caused the annoyance. Thus we see that what we are rashly apt to call illogicality is often really our ignorance of the premisses of the case and of our neighbour's mental process. Also, it must be remembered that my father was a Scotsman and a Calvinist, and therefore had a fixed belief in the efficacy of pain as a panacea for all moral disease. He would have scorned mercy to a peccant child as the most contemptible of all forms of moral cowardice. Of the two, to administer a severe beating to a child for a fault he had not committed would have been to him a much smaller injustice than to have spared the same child a thrashing for an offence of which he was really guilty. Of the latter crime I can conscientiously exonerate him.

It is, I have remarked, a common thing for the female members of a family not merely to imitate, but to exaggerate to the verge of caricature, any moral kink displayed by the head of the family. My father holding that I was possessed of a legion of devils only to be held in check by frequent castigation, my mother and my two younger sisters, a few years my seniors, quite naturally became imbued with the same belief. My mother had been bred in the tenets of the Church of England, but in marrying my father she had espoused his form of faith, and found herself quite at home in it. She was a born scold and tyrant, and to a temperament of that kind it must be a soul-satisfying joy to discover a religion which sanctions its prevailing

attributes, and sanctifies what was merely a luxurious indulgence into a sacred duty. Since every child born into the world is a bundle of original sin, since its every desire and appetite is prompted of the devil, it is the plain duty of the Christian parent to mortify those desires and appetites, and to curb and correct the lusts which persuade unto damnation. So, as, in common with every other normal child that ever lived or will live, I loathed fat and loved sugar, I was stinted of sugar and stuffed with fat—to the manifest improvement of both my health and my temper. If I showed symptoms of particular liveliness of an evening my mother dispatched me to bed; if I was too tired to hold my eyes open she kept me up an hour or two after my usual time. By feigning extreme weariness of any occupation I liked or of any book which interested me I could always extract from her a prompt order to go on with it, and such pretences were common resorts of mine—to the obvious advantage of my morals. I loved to draw, and had some slight natural talent in that direction. Sunday being the only day on which I got a real chance to follow that pursuit, my mother issued a ukase that drawing on that day was sinful. To show the least interest or amusement over any book on that day was to have it straightway confiscated—which, of course, greatly fortified my respect and affection for the Sabbath. I never knew her religion to inspire her to walk a mile or to spend a sixpence for the relief or comfort of any living being, but it was a most efficient and adaptable instrument for the annoyance of everybody about her. And this, I have been led to believe by

such knowledge of history as I possess and such scrutiny of my neighbours as I have been able to make, is true of most that passes by the name of religion. It is like the lost articles one sees advertised in the newspapers, "of no use to anybody but the owner." My sisters were remarkable for their early piety, and that piety, in relation to myself, took the form of what I considered, and still consider, an over-weening fear that my mother's righteous wrath, but for their constant aid and encouragement, might cool towards me, and I should consequently be less frequently flogged than was good for me. Their method of obviating that disastrous consummation was simple in the extreme. They had only to allege some cause of complaint against me, and there was not the least need for them to strain their powers of invention either—any little thing would do. Though, for the matter of that, they might have outsoared Baron Munchausen in the ether of romance at my expense, and have accused me of stealing the sun out of heaven, so long as they laid their complaint before my mother. For me to be accused before *her* tribunal was to be condemned—and thrashed. Indeed, so eager was she for my moral regeneration that I can remember many occasions on which she did not even wait to hear the charge against me. My sisters invariably prefaced their accusations with the chastely euphemistic formula: "Mother, I wish you'd *speak* to Harry." So adjured, my parent never failed to speak, and though her utterance was mostly confined to pantomime I never failed to understand it. I entertain a fixed conviction that if the filthiest tramp

on the highroad had met my mother on any day of the year, and had accused me of any conceivable offence, she would have made a bee-line for me and have flogged me without one single word of inquiry. My father did occasionally institute some preliminary inquisition before proceeding to execution—my mother never. That I *could* be innocent of any offence laid to my charge was to her unthinkable. On one occasion she discovered that a big earthen vessel, covered inside with blue glaze, and locally known as a "jowl," part of the baking outfit of the house, had been broken. The slavey of the period, a dirty, snivelling little trull from the local workhouse, accused me of having broken it, and gave a circumstantial account, every word of which was a lie, of how I had done it. I denied the charge, quite vainly, and received at my mother's hands one of the severest floggings I ever had. She was a devout Christian, and I remember one day hearing her inveigh with great eloquence about the wickedness of some "atheist" who denied the existence of Hell. I sincerely hope—as I sincerely believe—that the atheist was right. For, if the Eternal Judgment Bar is a reality, the most friendly and kindly witness will find it quite in vain to attempt any mercifully intended perjury before that all-knowing Tribunal, and I shall have to speak the truth there that I have written here. In that consideration I write "R.I.P." on my mother's tombstone with a full heart.

Since, during childhood and early youth, a boy's mother and sisters are, as a rule, the only specimens of womanhood of which he has opportunity of intimate study, his ideas of them will inevitably

colour his view of their sex. It was not the least abominable influence upon my character of that Temple of Naggery and House of Children's Tears, my early "home," that when I arrived at puberty the philosophical problem which most exercised my young intelligence was why God had created women. The period of the awakening of sex brought me the solution of that problem, and made my views of women a mixture of contempt for their hearts and brains with a crude desire of the physical pleasure they are capable of affording—a radically debasing conception which for years coloured my life, and has left indelible stains on my individuality.

Before passing to a justification — so sorely needed—of this sordid narrative, let me pay here a debt of gratitude to certain influences without which my childhood would have been more wretched even than it was. My sister Mary, the eldest of the family, was invariably kind, patient, and sisterly, and her marriage when I was ten years of age, necessitating her leaving home, was an unfortunate business for me. Two visits I paid her at her new home in Liverpool are among the few really bright spots of my early life, and her death two years ago, in pain and poverty as undeserved as they were bravely and sweetly borne, is a grief yet unassuaged. Of my brother Christie I shall speak in his place. Of two other brothers still living I remember nothing that was not kindly, and many acts and words of true affection.

If what I have hitherto had to say concerning my father has given a purely unpleasant idea of his personality the fault is none of mine, but such an

impression, left uncorrected, would be none the less a grave injustice to his memory. He was indubitably a good man, and the errors—which were nothing less in my view than frightful—of his treatment of me as a child do not blind me to his merits. He had fine qualities. He was far and away the honestest man I have ever met—"of an incorrigible and losing honesty," in Charles Lamb's phrase. He is the one man I have ever known of whom I can say that I do not believe that he ever told a lie in his life. I simply cannot imagine him paltering with the truth, and he had the instinctive moral purity of the finest type of woman, which shrinks from any foulness of thought as the ermine from a physical defilement. And, incongruous as the declaration may seem with what I have already written regarding him, he was emphatically just in intention. The one serious flaw in a character otherwise intrinsically noble was his contempt of the softer emotions, and that I believe to have been less an innate quality than the outcome of that filthy and abominable blasphemy against human nature, the Calvinist creed in which he had been bred. I cannot fancy that he had ever, even to my eldest brothers and sisters, been of the soft or doting type of parent. He had been stern even to the children who came to him in the first flush of hopeful manhood and wedded happiness, and if a man is stern with his first children, what is he likely to be to those who come after the exercise of twenty years of unchecked severity have indurated his contempt for childish suffering? Christie is remembered to this day among his contemporaries as "Tiger"

Murray, from the variegated appearance his skin never failed to present when stripped for bathing. The instrument of domestic torture in his day was the Scottish "tawse," a broad leathern thong like the window-strap of a third-class carriage, cut into fingers at one end, and toughened in the fire. This delectable apparatus had, in my time, given place to the cane. Which of the two is the most efficient pain-producer I do not know, never having sampled the "tawse," but the cane is, as Christopher Sly might say, "a good commonty." My father was wont to preface his severer executions with a formula to the effect that it hurt him as much to inflict the punishment as it hurt me to receive it. Twenty years earlier the statement had probably been true, but in my day it was nothing more and nothing less than an obvious catchword, which simply added insult of my infant discernment to the physical injury of the hiding, and I heartily wish nowadays that I had found the pluck to tell him so.

I find no pleasure in writing these things, and cannot conceive the human creature who could find pleasure in reading them, but I justify the record by the warning it enables me to offer to such of my readers as may happen to be parents. Beware how you let the devil of wrath against your child enter your heart. There is no vice more insidious, none of rapider growth, none more deadly, than the cruelty which believes itself to be based on duty—see the religious history of the world, *passim*. I write it deliberately, as the best thought I have to offer you, that to beat a little child is a cowardly

and inhuman crime, which no offence of which that child could by any possibility be guilty could justify. It brutalises and degrades you in the exact ratio in which it wounds the innate dignity of the child. I am no humanitarian crank. I have met more than one unendurable bounder who, had he received a solid, scientifically administered kicking at the psychological moment — say, on his twenty-first birthday—might have been improved by it into a passable imitation of a gentleman. I know quite well what to think of the man who lays his hand upon a woman, save etcetera, but I know also specimens of that truly awful creature, the cad in petticoats, who might be converted into quite decent women by the stern medicament of a sound thrashing. I regard the abolition of the Prize Ring as a national misfortune, and I am so far from deprecating the use of the cat in cases of cowardly violence that I would gladly apply it with my own hand. But I would no more think of beating a small child than I would of burning him, and I do not desire the acquaintance of any man capable of an act at once so brutal and so stupid.

That my father was capable of such cruel folly is merely the strangest of the many paradoxes of which his nature was composed. Since I formed the intention of writing this book I have passed many hours in reviewing my memories and impressions regarding him, and in trying to arrive at some literary formula by which I might make him intelligible to my readers—"to sum him up to a satisfactory total," in Dickens's phrase. I quite despair of accomplishing such a task. I can but set

on my paper a lot of dots and dashes to serve for the lineaments of a personality, striking in nearly all respects, in many, admirable; in some, genuinely lovable. To children who were not his own, and towards whom consequently his natural sentiments were unwarped by that foolishly twisted sense of duty inculcated by his Calvinist upbringing, he was gentleness and beneficence incarnate. He loved animals, and had that intuitive understanding of their mental processes which I have always found to be one of the traits most distinctive of a really fine nature. His love of cats amounted to a passion, and the attractive power he exercised over them was almost uncanny. I have seen him returning from a morning walk followed by a perfect procession of the creatures. Yet he would flog his own child till he drew blood on the strength of an unfavourable report from his schoolmaster! This curious topsyturviness ran through his entire nature. He was a furious radical in politics, and his radicalism was the direct outcome of a strong personal pride and an overweening sense of personal dignity —he would have met the Kaiser face to face with an unshrinking sense of absolute personal equality. Few can have been the people he had known so ill-advised as ever to have attempted to take the smallest personal liberty with him, and fear of any sort was a sensation I am quite certain he had never known. Yet he inculcated servility and cowardice in his children: insisted on them: and as bitterly resented any token of independence or assertion of equality in them as he would have repudiated an insult to himself. On one occasion I was present

when an old friend of the family repeated the encomiums passed on one of my elder brothers by his employer, a man in a large way of business in the town. "If the boy goes on as he is going now," said the friend, "I shouldn't be surprised if the old man were to take him on as a partner one of these fine days." I have seldom seen my father so violently angry. "Hoots, man!" he barked. "I'll just thank ye to put none o' that kind o' rubbish in the head o' a son o' mine, unsettling the boy and giving him ridiculous ideas of his own importance. The lad'll just do his wark and take his wages, and there an end." Had there been anything of the domestic bully about him this attitude would have been readily understandable, but that explanation is impossible—his was a nature quite infinitely removed from any such pettiness. His social conception was absolutely static, completely that of the catechism which teaches us to do our duty in that state of life into which it has pleased God to call us. He had been poorly born and Spartanly bred in that atmosphere of close, hard, self-respecting, utterly unambitious Scottish poverty which the average Englishman can scarcely conceive. He had kept his stern honesty and tetchy independence intact through it all—why could not his children be content to do the same? With as good natural brains as any but the very ablest men I have ever met, and with a literary culture really remarkable considering the straitened circumstances in which his life had been passed, he would have repudiated as a suggestion of the devil the idea of bettering his own condition or of lifting his

children a rung higher on the social ladder. To cherish the social outlook of a pauper a little over the actual workhouse-grade, to marry another pauper, and to beget a baker's dozen of equally poor-spirited contributions to the ensuing generation, was the entire Science of Life as taught to his own children by the most fiercely and fearlessly independent man I have ever known. I shall never forget what a vivid flash of light fell on my father's personality—and on many other things—when I first read the agonised cry of Browning's Paracelsus—

> "God's children!
> And yet He takes no pride in us—none, none!"

What the God of the Calvinist is to those who believe in Him, that my father was to me.

I have spoken of his literary ability. He was content to let it rust almost entirely, and for many years never put pen to paper save to write a business letter; yet at near seventy years of age he could produce such verse as the following, which is all I can remember hearing him read of a rhymed letter to an old schoolfellow in Scotland to whom he anticipated making a visit:—

> "Friend o' my youth, my auldest crony!
> My benison be on ye, Johnnie!
> Your honest pow was black and bonnie
> When first we met:
> But noo your lyart cockernoney
> Has tint the jet.
>
> * * * * *
>
> 'Queer pliskies, whiles, my fancy plays
> In thinkin' o' the lang-gone days

When we gaed brattlin' ower the braes
At oor auld callin',
Makin' and mendin' farmers' claes
In mony a dwallin'.

'We werena braw in Sunday claes,
And whiles the stanes wad hurt oor taes,
And little fruit but hips and haes
Fell till oor share;
Yet we were rich in mony ways
And had nae care.

* * * * *

"——noo and then
The thrifty wife wad ask us ben,
To hae a game at catch-the-ten,*
Or hear a sang,
Or whiles the fiddle spak', and then
Nae nicht seemed lang.

* * * * *

"And noo we're dune wi' youthfu' capers,
We still enjoy oor buiks and papers,
And wise men's thoughts, like weel-trimmed tapers,
Can cheer the way,
And light us on thro' mists and vapours
To endless day.

"My willyard thochts gang yon and hither—
But I maun end this rhymin' blether—
We'll hae a crack wi' ane anither
When there's nae hurry,
For ye hae lang been like a brither
To auld Will Murray."

That, it seems to me, is not bad verse for an unpractised amateur who had not attempted to pen a stanza for more than the length of an average human life.

* Scottish whist.

My father's literary tastes were oddly circumscribed, the gods of his youth held sway in his heart to the end. English poetry had died with Byron. For Tennyson he had a half-contemptuous toleration; Browning and Mrs. Browning he dismissed as scribblers of obscure and pretentious rubbish; Mr. Swinburne he whole-heartedly contemned and abhorred as "a jingling, lustful, seducer of youth." Dickens he loved with the love of his generation, the generation which had waited eagerly from month to month for the shilling numbers of "Pickwick."

The one real passion of his life was chess, which he played sufficiently well to establish himself as champion over a pretty wide local area. He had taught my elder brothers to play, but as they grew up and went out into the world he found himself without a playmate. With something of an heroic sense of self-sacrifice—for I loathe the so-called "game" as heartily as Mrs. Sarah Battle herself—I offered to supply their place, but the offer was declined on altruistic grounds. He would not, he said, do me so ill a turn; adding that, had he otherwise employed the hours he had wasted over the board, he might have made himself an excellent linguist and a first-class mathematician.

To complete these inchoate and scrambling jottings, which are the best substitute for a portrait my poor skill can furnish, I should add that for years before I was born and to the day of his death my father probably never passed a waking hour quite free from pain. He was a martyr to a peculiarly virulent form of asthma. He suffered,

too, from hernia, acquired by a vain effort to save from death an unfortunate young fellow who, maddened by an unjust accusation of theft, had hanged himself. The strain of lowering the body to the ground had ruptured him severely, and his paroxysmal cough frequently shook the intestine out of place. He bore his physical inflictions with a really splendid courage, never himself referring to them, and showing marked impatience of any proffered sympathy. I have heard of natures which seem to be sweetened by incessant pain, and for all I know to the contrary such natures may veritably exist, but my father's was not of them, and much testiness and irritability must be pardoned to a man so sorely plagued.

I cannot believe, nor do I think it probable that my reader will very strongly disagree with my views in this respect, that such a regimen as my father's, administered by such a man as he, was quite the best possible. I have had occasion, like most other people, now and then to smile over that insanity of paternal pride which converts a dullard into a genius, and a goose of a rather poor breed into a swan of impossible perfection, but such an error is not merely more comforting to its object than that opposed error from which I suffered, it is vastly better for the moral being of both parent and child, and especially for the latter. I am with Alfred de Musset in this matter—"C'est toujours mon avis de gâter les enfants"—and I hold it far better to spoil the child than to spoil the rod by over-use. A happy childhood is not merely in itself a beautiful thing, its memory is an abiding

possession, a jewel of great price, which any subsequent cruelty the world may wreak upon us can only burnish to a brighter lustre. Friends, make friends of your children. Where else than in a child's heart shall you look for so pure and passionate a love? Remember that the day will inevitably come when the lisping babe whose character and fate are in your hands as the clay of the potter will deliver the final and irrevocable judgment which will set you on the right hand or the left, among the sheep or with the goats. So long as your children live, you will live, no breach of that spiritual continuity is possible. I am growing grey, and a few years will bend my head to the earth wherein my parents have been lying so long, but to me they are living presences, and I shall tread to the end the path in which they set my feet. I remember that moment in my early manhood when my father said to me that he hoped I should give him my confidence, should regard him as my closest friend, a present help in trouble. "Is it not a little late for that?" I asked; and I can yet see the stricken look upon the sad old face, and wish with all my heart that the words, just as they were, had gone unspoken. Though, perhaps, they helped to clear the atmosphere between us, and to establish a basis for such reconciliation as was possible. Certainly, we were better friends during the last five years I spent with him than ever before. My mother died when I was fifteen, and approximately at about the same time, my sisters went their respective ways into the world, and he and I being left together with no third person to blow the coal

of dissension between us, the fire died down, and we arrived at least at toleration of each other.

That my father was essentially a good man was proved, to my thinking, by the fashion in which he died. Feeling, on the morning of his last day of life, that the final summons was near at hand, he insisted on being taken out of bed and completely dressed. One of his earliest acquaintances had been an old blind piper, one Donald MacEchran, who was piloted about the countryside by a dog. My father, in a boyish prank, had stolen the dog, and the old man had uttered the grim prophecy, "Wully Murray, ye'll die in your boots"—meaning thereby, of course, that he would come to be hanged. "If all tales are true," remarked my father, "auld Donald and I will have a laugh ower that or the day be out." A man who could affront death with so serene a courage must have been a good man. Whatever his errors, he had certainly never gravely sinned against his own interior light. My father's end was peace. Peace be with him.

Perhaps the habit, recently alluded to, and for many years carefully cultivated, of banishing the period of childhood from my mind, has resulted in obliterating many memories I might otherwise have clearly retained. I remember certain insignificant incidents with an almost startling clearness, but the general impression is blurred and indecipherable. I can recall with photographic distinctness what must have been one of my earliest attempts to walk. I see myself and the attendant details as in a picture. I am clad in a tartan frock

of red and black stripes, and a grey cloth jacket ornamented with black velvet, I wear a "pork-pie" hat decorated with a red feather, and shining shoes fastened round the ankle by leathern straps fixed by buttons of blue glass. I am voyaging, very unsteadily, across the hearthrug between the extended arms of my sister Mary and my father. The latter is dressed in grey tweed, he has a newspaper doubled over his right knee, and his spectacles are pushed up over his forehead among his bushy, opinionated-looking shock of grey hair. As I can see the flames of a fire brilliantly reflected in his glasses I conclude that the incident takes place on a winter afternoon.

Another little scene, sharply defined as an etching. I am sitting in a tub of warm water, by the side of the kitchen fire. Behind me, ticking solemnly, is an old eight-day grandfather's clock. Seated beside the table under the window, smoking a big curved wooden pipe with a bright metal cover, is my sailor-brother, John, who died when I was three. I am blowing the soap-bubbles off my lips into the face of my sister Mary, who kneels beside me swathed from chin to knees in a coarse herden apron, and with bare soapy arms, and laughing as she tries to evade them. It is Saturday night, though how I know that I should be puzzled now to say. But I do know it perfectly well, and also that it is market-night, and that the long street outside, its blackness broken by shop-window lights and flaring naphtha-lamps on hucksters' stalls, is thronged with people, for whom I feel a sort of pity as I watch the whirling snow-flakes visible

through the window, and feel the contrast between the warmth and snugness about me and the raw discomfort out of doors. I see myself, a little flaxen-haired figure in a white nightgown, like a diminutive edition of the conventional angel, being carried up to bed in Mary's arms, and can catch a dim echo of the song she croons to me.

It would probably be a year or two later that I made what I still remember as my Great Discovery. I had been left alone in the garden one afternoon an hour or so before my customary bedtime. It being rather early or rather late—I have forgotten which—in the year, I had not long been left to myself before the twilight began to close in. To be abroad and alone at that hour was a most wonderful and pride-inspiring experience, quite untinctured, so far as I can remember, by any fear of the gathering gloom. Indeed, I was so far from being afraid of the darkness that I conceived the idea of passing the entire night in the open-air, and to accomplish that end scaled the wall of the garden at its lowest height, and hid myself behind an outhouse in the neighbouring field. I cannot remember with what sensations I watched the gradual dying of the light; all feelings experienced between the moment of my escape from the garden and that in which the Great Discovery dawned upon me have faded from my recollection. Whatever they may have been they merged into a transport of wonder, admiration, delight, for which my pen can find no words, as first in single spies, and then in splendid, glittering battalions, the stars shone out upon the glooming sky. My little heart expanded

well-nigh to bursting with some such nameless rapture as that which filled the breast of Cortes when, with eagle eye, he stared at the Pacific. Like Cortes at that moment; like Franklin when the javelin of the lightning stabbed his silken kite; like the Marquis of Worcester when the heated water split the shaft of his cannon; like Newton when the apple rapped him on the pate; like the mediæval monk when his mixture of charcoal, sulphur, and saltpetre sent his pestle, his mortar, and himself flying triivious, I had made my Great Discovery. There was a favourite girl-cousin of mine in the house at that moment, and no delight she did not share was perfect. Oblivious of the bricks which scratched my hands and barked my shins, not even remembering that my appearance in the family circle would be the certain signal for my dismissal to bed, I tumbled over the wall and tore into the house. "Alice! Alice! Come and see what I've found!" She came, and saw, and laughed!—a laugh which, for the moment, stung me with a pain which even her kisses could not heal all at once. I had indeed made a great "find." I had discovered the Solar System, not in the piecemeal, retail fashion of Copernicus and Galileo, but in one lot, and with immediate complete possession.

My childish self, at that supreme moment of wonder and delight, has become to me a standing simile, an ever true and faithful type, both of my later self and of humanity at large. I have made many discoveries since then, but none so big or so beautiful—none indeed at all closely resembling it

except in its pathetico-ludicrous absence of originality, and have been laughed at for proclaiming them. There was a moment when, in the firmament of my own soul, I discovered a galaxy of vivid splendours, stars and planets and constellations of idea and emotion, and summoned the world, as erst I had summoned Cousin Alice, to behold the glories I had found. And again I was laughed at—by no means this time for the obviousness of my discovery. I could have borne that well enough. No, I was told either that the wonders I proclaimed did not exist at all, or that they were at best but Jack-o'-Lantern exhalations of a barren and swampy intelligence. Nor can gentle Cousin Alice stand as a type of those who derided my later discovery. Would that she might! In her laughter there had been no malice, no sense of petty superiority in the destruction of a vain and foolish vision—nothing but the clean mirth of girlhood and the tender pity which even an experience so small as hers could feel for the illusion of a baby who counted only one-fifth of her brief tale of years. The world laughs at the innocent and pompous proclamations of our adult illusions, which is well; but it palliates its wounding scorn with no anodyne of pity, which is well also, perhaps, but surely not *so* well. The disillusionments of childhood leave no final sense of loss; the bubbles blown by a baby are but of soap and water; but in our later years they are streaked and stained to beauty by our heart's blood, and the breaking of each in turn is something of a cataclysm.

It is curious that, although I have no faintest

memory of being taught my letters, I have a clear recollection of the shame I suffered because a little blue-eyed mite of a girl possessed that accomplishment, and I did not. I remember, too, producing a double effect on the mind of an elderly gentleman, a manufacturing chemist of the neighbourhood, by stoutly proclaiming that I could read, and proving the same by repeating to him by rote the words of a picture book of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," turning the pages accurately in the right places. I can see the old gentleman's amazed face, and hear him ejaculate, "Astonishing! Astonishing!" My father explained that I was not reading, but merely reciting from memory, whereon the other replied, "More astonishing still. My dear Murray, that boy will make a remarkable man." A nice old gentleman, but no prophet.

From the moment at which I conquered the mystery of reading I did as little of anything else as my seniors would let me. I devoured anything in print that came my way, and the verbal memory which has always been by far the strongest of my faculties enabled me to store my mind with hundreds of passages of verse and prose the meaning of which only dawned on me years later. My memory, by the way, is in some respects curiously erratic and undependable. For words, and especially for words cast into the form of verse, I have encountered few which could compete with it, but for certain matters much more important in the everyday business of life it is abnormally and irritatingly bad. I have no memory of places, and my lack of the sense of locality is so complete as almost to amount to a

positive, instead of a negative, quality. After thirty years of acquaintance with London, I am constantly amazed at finding that two given places I had thought to be miles apart are really close together, or that two neighbourhoods I had believed to be closely contiguous are in reality wide asunder. Like Mr. Kipling's camel, "I lose myself forever if you let me stray a mile." The most careful system of mnemonics and the closest study of maps have been powerless to remedy this defect. And figures are almost absolutely devoid of meaning to me. For many years the only date of which I was quite certain was that conveyed in the jingling rhyme—

> "In the year ten hundred and sixty-six
> William the Conqueror in England did fix—"

and I could have memorised the whole of *Paradise Lost* with less trouble than it has taken me to supplement that slender store by the score or so of dates which are absolutely necessary to a student of history. To this day I have a sort of sense of personal obligation to Chaucer for having died in 1400, and to Charles V. and our Charles I. for having been so obliging as to have been born in 1500 and 1600 respectively. On one occasion my schoolmaster wrote to my father stating that, although a good pupil in most respects and an excellent one in some, I seemed incapable of making the smallest improvement in arithmetic. My father, of course, on his invariable theory, set down this shortcoming to sheer perversity. He presented me on the first day of the summer holiday with a book of tables, and gave

me to understand that if I could not, before returning to school, repeat to him the multiplication table up to twelve times twelve I might prepare myself for painful consequences. I passed a month of unmitigated misery over the task, and had at last to confess that I knew no more about it than I had known at starting. My father had the justice to credit me with good intention. He spared me the threatened castigation, and wrote to the master to the effect that, since I should obviously never shine as an arithmetician, he had better let me concentrate on other subjects.

It was when I was about five years of age that, walking one morning along Paradise Street, I was accosted by a grey-haired, hideous old hag of a woman, who hailed me as "her pretty little gentleman," and asked me if I could read. On my replying in the affirmative, she begged me, with many honeyed phrases, to accompany her to a house a few doors off, to read a letter which had come for her daughter that morning. I consented, and she led me to a two-storeyed cottage, one of a row, whose lower floor was approached by a descent by four or five steps of worn and broken brick, and into a room lit by a window with diamond panes framed in strips of lead. The walls of the room were almost hidden by funeral cards, each separately contained in a skimpy frame of black wood, and looking curiously out of keeping with one or two gaudy lithographs. Sitting at a little round table, with a letter in her hand, was a girl of about twenty years of age. At the elder

woman's request she gave me the letter, and I began to read it. I remember absolutely nothing of its contents—I was probably too much occupied with the task of deciphering it to pay much attention to its gist—but suddenly the old woman set up a strident howl of grief, and the girl, dropping her head on to the table between her extended arms, and writhing her body as if in an ecstasy of anguish, sobbed bitterly. And there the memory comes sharply to an edge. I do not even remember how I left the place. I must have passed it hundreds of times thereafter, but I never saw either the old or the young woman—either of whom I should at once have recognised, and whose faces I can recall with perfect clearness at this moment—again. Nor did I ever, so far as my memory goes, speak a word about the occurrence to any other person.

I have another memory connected with that odd custom of collecting funeral cards. It is, or was, universal among the poorer class in the Black Country, and an unusually large assortment of these lugubrious memorials gave to its possessor something of that aristocracy bestowed in other circles by a Vinegar Bible or "a Grignon with the Regent's crest." They were handed on as heirlooms from parent to child, and I have heard of them as items of testamentary bequest. Once, when taking a country walk, I sought refuge against a rainstorm in a solitary wayside cottage. The little front room, which served the family as kitchen, parlour, dining-room, and one member at least as a bedchamber, was quite papered with them from wainscot to ceiling. In the place of

honour over the mantel, with a little clear space all round it, was one of larger size than ordinary, set in an incongruous gilt frame. The central space which accommodated the letterpress was surrounded by dropsical cherubs in filigree, hovering round a couple of impossibly constructed angels weeping into a pot-bellied funeral urn, and beneath the name and date of death of the person commemorated were printed the following lines :—

"When I am dead and in my grave,
And all my bones are rotten,
Dear mother you will think of me
When I am quite forgotten."

There are moments—and rather frequent moments too—when a dose of literary culture is a perilous possession, and I have seldom been nearer to laughing without doing it than I was at that moment. The quiet, decent old body, who was for the moment my hostess, saved me from committing that outrage. "Ah!" she said, in a quavering old voice in which grief and pride were touchingly blended, "my poor George, as died in that very bed a year come next Saturday, maäde that poetry out of his own yed on'y a wik afore he died, an' wrote it down wi' his own hand." I wonder if there is any passage in Æschylus or Shakespeare or Milton which has ever brought so much comfort to any stricken human heart as that bit of appalling doggerel brought to that poor old woman ?

I was sent to my first school at about nine years of age. It was kept by two partners, one of whom

was an excellent linguist. He disappeared somewhat mysteriously soon after I left his control, and I have a dim recollection of having heard it stated that he served as a German spy in the war which broke out a year or two later, and that he had been caught and summarily shot by the French. The school was one of some pretension, and the wearing of a college-cap, vulgarly known as a "mortar-board," was enforced on the pupils. This mark of distinction was resented by the youthful democrats of the neighbourhood, and was the occasion of much persecution of the smaller fry of the school at their hands. One of them—I never knew his name, or anything about him—made himself peculiarly offensive to me, but I noticed that, unless he was accompanied by others of his own kidney, or if I was in the society of comrades, he was careful to avoid me. He was older, and considerably bigger and stronger than myself, but this prudence on his part inspired me with doubts concerning his courage, which, as the sequel showed, were well founded. I, alone, met him, solitary, one evening at the corner of Hargate Lane, leading off the High Street. At sight of him I uttered a squeal of terror, and bolted as if from a vision of sudden death. He followed me with whoops of triumph and contempt. I lured him to a deserted spot, and there paid off old scores in a fashion which made him yelp for mercy like a whipped puppy. I have seldom enjoyed myself more, and went home inflated with a great opinion of my merits, less as a combatant than as a strategist.

I passed a couple of years at my first school,

and then, owing I suppose to a fluctuation in the family fortunes, was transferred to a cheaper one, where the college-cap was unknown. It was kept by a middle-aged man, the very model of a lower middle-class pedagogue of the old type, with that prim, picked, precise method of speech which is almost invariably the peculiarity of the man self-educated rather late in life. There was a belief in my family that he had at one time, some few years earlier, cherished matrimonial intentions towards my eldest sister, Mary. He had at all events paid sundry visits to our house, and, finding himself on one occasion alone with my sister for a few minutes, had suddenly inquired, after several abortive attempts at articulation, "What are your ideas regarding furniture, Miss Murray?" Mary was far too kind-hearted a girl willingly to have wounded anybody's feelings, even those of the least welcome wooer, but she had a rather acute sense of humour, and the struggle between politeness and an hysterical desire to laugh had ended in her bolting into the garden, leaving the question unanswered. The schoolmaster had never again crossed our threshold, but had obviously found consolation elsewhere, for at the time of my passing under his care he was a married man.

I do not remember that at either of these schools I learned anything worth the knowing, and but for my own private reading should have entered life a monument of ignorance. What little I know —and I am painfully ignorant of much which the great majority of educated people take for granted —I have picked up in my own haphazard fashion.

I look back on the time spent at school as, educationally considered, so much sheer waste. Had my father kept me at home, let me follow my own bent in reading, supplied me with a good encyclopædia, atlas, and etymological dictionary, and insisted on a thorough use of them, I should have been a vastly better-informed man than I can now ever hope to be. For most boys—perhaps for the great majority—a school course is the best means of education, but to me it was no good at all.

In one respect my father was supremely wise. He let me read what I would. I shall never forget the wrath and amazement of my mother when, after perusing some pages of the "Decameron," she discovered my name written on the title-page. (I was then about twelve.) My father let her fluent objurgations run to an end, and made no reply, except to forbid her to burn the book, as she had proposed to do. Later on, when I was a young man, I recalled the incident to his mind, and expressed some surprise that he, so stern a moralist, should have winked at my study, not merely of the "Decameron," but of books even less decent.

"It was best," he answered. "The evil of such books did not then exist for you, and they did you no such harm as they would do if you read them for the first time now, when your passions have awakened. And, if I had taken them from you, you would have read them in secret, and I did not choose that you should be more of a liar than nature had made you." *Toujours poli, vous savez, monsieur mon père.*

I fancy, looking back upon my school-days, that

I must have been a rather reticent and self-centred sort of boy, without much capacity for the making of friendships. I do not remember any other boy who played Jonathan to my David, or Pythias to my Damon. Two only of my classmates stand out with any marked distinction in my memory. One was J——, a curly-headed, lively, mischievous young demon, from whose freckled, snub-nosed face gaiety, pluck, and impudence radiated as light from a candle. I have a vivid remembrance of finding myself one sweltering Saturday afternoon half-holiday in the open country in his society, penniless, choked with thirst, and with the mockery of an empty ginger-beer bottle in my pocket. We came across a cow browsing in a field, and J——, always full of resource, hit upon what then seemed to me the magnificently practical idea of milking the cow into the bottle. The result of this experiment was that he got badly kicked in the stomach by the cow, and vindictively chased for a considerable distance by a yokel armed with a pitchfork. On another occasion it was discovered that the books and papers contained in the desk of an extremely unpopular boy who had earned a double infamy by playing the dual part of the sneak and bully of the school had been kneaded into a mass of wet clay which entirely filled the desk. The deed was clearly traced to J——, whose hands and garments were loud in testimony against him. The master was already giving the cane the deadly preliminary switch when J—— was inspired to deprecate judgment by the amazing plea that "he didn't know there was any rule against it." The Homeric laugh

with which the statement was received I hope mitigated the severity of the flogging, but flogged he was.

C—— was another boy of whom my memory remains pretty much intact. He was incredibly lean, with a face of ghastly pallor, extremely prominent grey eyes, and hair of a startling tint of vermilion. As an imaginative liar he still stands pre-eminent in my experience. He was wont to spend his holidays with some relations who dwelt in a little fishing village on the east coast, which he represented to myself and other greenhorns of the same age as a resort of pirates of the most desperate and sanguinary description. On the opening day of one term he curdled my young blood by a narrative of how, stung to madness by the brutality of a detested uncle—himself a pirate, but of a poor, degenerate type of maritime bandit—who had applied to him the degrading appellation of "a beardless stripling," he had slain the said uncle, and interred his ensanguined corpse in a quicksand. How, finding suspicion thickening about him, he had fled to the quay, and had there found a steamer, the captain of which, clad in a gold-embroidered uniform and a cocked-hat, was ringing a bell and calling out "Hurry up! Any more for India?" The captain had listened to his story, had thanked him in the name of the mariners of England for the assassination of that "black-hearted swab," his uncle, whose nefarious character had been known to all, and had engaged him as cabin-boy and first lieutenant. All had gone well for a time, but in the neighbourhood of the Hebrides it was discovered that the

detrimental uncle was not only not dead, but was actually concealed as a stowaway upon that identical ship. I have forgotten the subsequent details of the story, but I remember that I believed every word of it implicitly, and thought C—— the most marvellous of created beings.

I was, as I have said, ten years of age when my sister Mary married. Her husband was a sailor, and my schoolfellow C——'s wildest legends paled in interest beside his narratives of dry fact. Within a year of his marriage I was invited to spend my summer holiday at his house in Liverpool, and later on I made a much longer stay with him. During my first visit he lived in a house in Great Homer Street, and then in a villa in the immediate neighbourhood of West Derby Road, close to Shiel Park. Years later I made a special pilgrimage to find the place, but it had disappeared as absolutely as my vanished self, who had been so happy there. Had I then formed any conscious intention of taking to the literary life I might have garnered a golden harvest of event from the talk of the old salts who night after night yarned to each other over their steaming tumblers in the little room my brother-in-law called his "cuddy." They were the denizens of a world then fast vanishing, and now quite gone. The man who conned and steered the first steamship out of the port of Liverpool was among them, another had been concerned with the laying of the first transatlantic cable. I remember most clearly Captain H——, a vast, bush-bearded, beetle-browed, old Viking of a man, six feet six inches in his stocking-feet, and more than proportionately

broad and thick, who was the father of eighteen sons. He had never had a daughter, which was really a grief to him, hidden under his growling formula, "The H——'s don't breed bitches." It was a grand sight to see this superb old heathen accompanied by any half-dozen of his boys who happened to be at home—they were all sailors—going to church of a Sunday morning. I have a notion that he was one of the wickedest old villains that ever trod a deck, but amorous peccadilloes and Bacchanalian orgies had left him a staunch Churchman. The eighteen sons, born in triple honourable wedlock, were by no means his only contributions to the manhood of the rising generation, and it was his boast that he had not, on shore, gone to bed sober for over fifty years. I can see him now, his huge bulk towering amid the smoke-wreaths in the cuddy, and hear the succession of short, sharp barks in which he spoke. As thus: "This morning—reading the paper—shadow falls across it. Look up and see—great big devil of a chap—size of a house—beard as broad as a shovel. 'How are ye, Cap'n?' says he. Says I, 'Who the hell—are you?' 'I'm Alexander.' 'Alexander what?'—says I. 'Alexander H——,' says he. 'D'ye mean as you're—a son o' mine?' 'Yes.' 'D'ye know your way—to your bedroom?' 'Yes.' 'Then go there—be damned to you.' And there he is—this present minute—eating my victuals—drinking my rum. Suppose it's all right. But I don't know. Seems to me there's a chance—any damned beach-comber—in the port—o' Liverpool—can't get a ship—coming to me—saying

he's a son o' mine." I should say that the chances of the old gentleman suffering from such an imposition were small enough. His sons were all indubitable chips of the old block, as big and as handsome as himself.

Naturally and inevitably, these second-hand glimpses of sea-life and first-hand impressions of marine character inspired me with a burning desire for the life of a sailor. That desire was vetoed by my father. My brother John, to whom I have already alluded, had died in consequence of exposure aboard ship, aggravated by the cruelty of a drunken and brutal skipper. I still regret my father's decision. I believe travel to be the finest and most valuable part of education, and a few years spent in that way, under the care of a kindly superior of ripe experience and considerable intelligence, who was actually at hand in the person of my brother-in-law, would have been of great service to me. I should probably have known a little less about books than I actually know, but vastly more of men and things, and I should have been under salutary discipline, the greatest need of a weak and drifting nature, and the influence which has been most conspicuously absent from my life.

I left school at fourteen, and, in accordance with my father's idea—sensible enough—that every man not born to independent means should begin life with a working knowledge of some trade or handicraft, spent a couple of years in his printing-office, as my elder brothers had done before me. Having by this time definitely made up my mind

that literature was my vocation, and being moreover as idle a youngster as ever drew breath, I did as little work as I could manage. I had grown too big to thrash, and had indeed issued a forthright manifesto to the effect that the reign of what Walter Besant called "the first legislator—good old Father Stick"—must be considered definitely over. So when, a town library having been voted by the Town Council, one of the Councillors proposed to my father that I should apply for the post of sub-librarian, he was probably as glad to get rid of me as I was to go. I spent three years in that berth, beginning by helping my chief to catalogue the books, and having the run of my intellectual teeth among them. They were by no means a bad collection, for one or two of the book-buying committee were men of genuine culture, and the time I spent among them gave me the greater part of such knowledge of the solider English classics as I possess.

I left the library at seventeen in order to join Christie in London. Contrary to my expectations, I had rather a dreary time of it. Christie was then working in the Press Gallery of the House of Commons, and frequently did not get home until two or three o'clock in the morning. Naturally he spent a good part of the daylight hours in bed. I was too young and too raw to be his companion, or to see much of his friends, and I was a good deal alone. So, when, for some reason or other, he went abroad, I went back home with less reluctance than I might otherwise have felt. For a time I pretended to work in the printing-office, and after

a while found a berth, through the suggestion of a friend of my father, in the office of the local gas-works. I had practically nothing to do there, but on the strength of copying an occasional letter for the chief engineer I called myself his secretary. He called me an idle young devil. This period, which lasted for three years, had one good effect. I came into close daily contact with some four hundred members of the proletariat, some skilled and many unskilled workers, and so acquired an intimate knowledge of them which has given me an abiding liking and respect for that thoroughly good fellow, the English working man.

Most of my time at the gasworks was passed in the "rodney-house," as the men called the building in which they spent the intervals between their shifts of labour, eating, drinking, playing cards, and swapping stories. Pretty nearly every local accent from Northumberland to Cornwall was represented among them, and there was a strong dash of the Irish element, but I never met a gas-stoker who was a Scotsman. The matters in which they were disadvantageously differentiated from their social superiors were mostly things of the surface, and the grisly expletives with which they seasoned their talk had no real significance. Taking them in the lump, I have never met a better crowd, nor do I desire to. The labouring man, in my experience of him, has a certain clear, direct simplicity of outlook on the world; a comradeship, so to speak, with the bed-rock facts of existence, which is extremely healthy and tonic to men of other kinds when they have the good luck to meet it and the common

sense to value it. There is a sort of person, often quite unwitting of any snobbery in his mental attitude, who takes it for granted that social virtue ceases to exist at some indeterminate point down the social scale. It would be a sufficiently silly libel on human nature to say that it ceases at any point *up* the scale, but the latter statement would be greatly nearer the truth. Hopefulness, tolerance, charity, pluck, and the robuster virtues generally are necessities of existence to the class who live, marry, and rear a family on thirty shillings a week.

Individual character abounded among the men, of course—there is no sort of society in which it does not, to an observant eye. One of the stokers was a man named St. Clair. He was proud of his name, insisted on it being correctly pronounced, and would not suffer anybody of his own rank to plebeianise it into the commoner form of "Sinclair." As he was extremely strong, a more than fair amateur pugilist, and perennially ready to take to his fists, he had his way in that as in most other matters. He was among the half-dozen handsomest men I have ever seen in my life, and decidedly superior in education to most of his mates. I asked him on one occasion why he had never tried to better himself, and to rise above mere manual labour. "Why should I?" he asked in return. "There are only two things in life worth troubling about, the two W's—whisky and women, and I can get all I want of them as I am." I am afraid the time came when one-half of that statement ceased to be true. Another stoker, a blackavized, fierce, ugly little man named Green, had somehow become

possessed of a very pretty little wife, of whom he was inordinately fond and jealous. I was present one day when a violent quarrel exploded between him and St. Clair, the former accusing his mate of evil intent against his domestic peace. The two were held apart, and nothing happened for the moment; but a night or two later Green met his rival and his wife together in what he chose to consider suspicious circumstances, and with a slash of his pocket-knife laid St. Clair's cheek open from the corner of the lip to the base of the ear. Green received a sentence of imprisonment, and St. Clair carried his ruined beauty elsewhere, and was no more seen in those parts.

Another of the men I most clearly remember was a ganger known about the works by the sobriquet of "Softy"—much as Mark Twain's astute hero was known as "Pudd'nhead." He was a loosely-built, apple-faced, slouching man of late middle-age, with tow-coloured hair which fell in a disorderly fringe over his forehead; prominent, sleepy brown eyes; a pendulous nether lip, and a general air of good-natured fatuity. He kept his coals in a disused pigstye under the party-wall which separated his little strip of garden-ground from that of a neighbour. It occurred to him that his stock melted with unnatural rapidity. He held his own counsel, but one night as he sat at supper the noise of a terrific explosion was heard next door, and his neighbour's family rushed into the street shouting for help. "Softy" was prompt in offering assistance, and it was soon perceived that no real damage had been done.

"How did it come about, 'Zekiel?" asked an acquaintance.

"Goramighty knows—*I* don't," replied the sufferer. "I was asettin' by the hob, areadin' the paäper to the missus, w'en the fire went off wi' a bang as flyted we welly out of we'r wits."

"Ah!" said "Softy," "it's a rum happennin', trewly. If I didn't know what a honest chap thee bist, 'Zekiel, I mought ha' thowt as yo'd been astealin' my coal. I drilled a hole in a loomp last night, an' put a hounce o' blastin' powder in it."

A grim little incident of this period may be added here. Wandering about the works one winter evening I came across an old watchman apparently asleep in a little hut built of rough planking. There was a brazier of coal burning beside him, and I gently smeared his nose and cheeks with soot collected from the rafters overhead. In the morning I heard that the old fellow had been found, so decorated, and stone dead.

I am not—so far as I understand my own character—by any means an unfriendly sort of person, and in the last thirty years of my life have made and kept a very respectable body of friends. But in the surroundings amid which my first twenty years were passed the more genial side of my nature would seem to have been frozen. I hated the place I lived in—how much, I really had no idea until I finally got away from it and among the kind of people in whose society I could expand—the people who loved the things I loved, whose life was passed in reading, writing, talking, thinking books. I was not altogether bereft of this species

of companionship. Spencer Leigh Hughes, now known to many thousands of readers all over the face of England through the columns of keen and trenchant comment on current event printed over the signature "Sub Rosa," was at that time in the employment of a business house in the High Street. He and J. P., the son of a local tradesman, who had a passion for the classics, kept me in countenance, and their company afforded me most of the not too many happy hours I spent during this portion of my life. But I heartily disliked most of the people with whom I came into contact, unlike Christie, who was thoroughly at home among them, and studied them with a relishing interest which inspired, in "Joseph's Coat," "Aunt Rachel," and "Old Blazer's Hero," many of his best pages. My sentiment towards my surroundings came out in one rather queer form. Between seventeen and twenty I was, I believe, as much in love as any boy of those years ever has been since love first came on earth. I can see her now with absolute distinctness as she was then, and she was a singularly pretty little person. I have an idea—I suppose I may say so at this time of day without risk of being thought too much of a coxcomb—that she was not altogether averse or indifferent to me, but, sincere as my passion was, I sedulously kept out of her way, for the simple reason that any tie established between us would have been also a link between me and the place in which we both lived. I had two conflicting and tormenting desires regarding her—to look at her and to avoid her. In the hideous little Independent chapel to which both our families

resorted on Sundays her father's pew was slightly in front of ours, and she habitually sat in the broad shaft of light falling through a large window of plain glass, her graceful head silhouetted against the panes, and her wonderful mass of hair, of the colour of ripe corn, shining in the sunlight. The place had been a Gehenna to me until I was old enough successfully to revolt against my enforced attendance, but a little while after I had gained that victory I renounced its fruits and went with perfect regularity twice every Sunday, undeterred by the droning oratory of the black-gowned ex-cheesemonger who, in the pulpit, wrestled with the Spirit—and his h's—for the privilege of feasting my eyes on the figure of a girl I would not have married for her weight in diamonds. I hung at night about the street in which she lived, and walked incalculable miles to meet her by apparent accident, but I do not remember that I ever spoke twenty consecutive words to her, or wanted to.

It was on the day preceding my twentieth birthday that I left my native town to begin my literary life as my brother Christie's amanuensis. I had done what was perhaps an unusual amount of reading for a boy of those years, but next to no thinking, and my knowledge of the world outside the little place in which my childhood and youth had been passed was practically nil. Christie was at that time living at Thames Ditton, in a cottage facing the Common, and for the first few months of my time with him I did no work at all. He had

a consuming itch, without any great amount of talent, for landscape painting, and for many years it was his wont, on the completion of any bit of literary work, to devote its proceeds to as long a spell of unremunerative canvas-spoiling as they would run to, and only to return to labour when the wolf was actually at the door. He had recently returned from Turkey, whither he had gone as special correspondent for the *Times* during the war with Russia, and the funds were already running low, but he daubed away with undisturbed placidity, and was full to the brim with that sort of splendid project which is, compared with accomplished work, what apple blossom is to cider. He was the god of my youthful idolatry, and I believed in his visions as implicitly as he himself, and in my mind's eye complacently beheld the pair of us ascending rung after rung of the ladder of success towards a bright and radiant paradise of literary immortality. It is a fine thing to have the capacity of hero-worship, but like so many other fine things in this exasperating life of ours, it has its drawbacks. To model, out of any poor substitute for gold your nature may furnish, a glorious statue of perfection with the features of some beloved individual is the most delightful of occupations to the mind of ardently worshipping youth, but when the ungilded original will persist in walking into the Holy of Holies and knocking whole chunks at a time off his counterfeit presentment—your cherished handi-work, in which you have much of the pride of a creator—it is a saddening experience.

Very certainly, no man who ever wore the

burden of our mortal flesh could have realised my boyish conception of my brother: to say in cold type at this time of day how far he fell short of that foolish and impossible ideal would be as useless as it would be painful. *Ex parte* statements of misunderstandings with people who are no longer here to present their aspect of the case must always be futile. So, although Christie was for some years the dominating factor of my life, and although his influence will remain indelibly impressed upon my career and character so long as I remain alive, I shall have little to say regarding him. The noble counsel Charles Dickens left to his children is, I have long thought, almost as beautiful, and far more practicable, than the Golden Rule itself—"Be patient with all things which are not coldly and deliberately wrong." Of that sort of wrong my brother did perhaps as little as any man I have ever intimately known. He was kindly—as *he* understood kindliness: generous—as *he* understood generosity. His faults were rather those of omission than of commission, and, had I been made other than I am, might have affected me scarcely at all. I am a creature of circumstance, a moral chameleon taking the colour of my surroundings, and having—so far as I understand the complexities of my own nature—very little either of positive good or positive evil in me. Christie regarded life, not as a task to be performed, not as a discipline for any higher experience, not as a stricken field wherein to exhibit courage, not as a hospital for the practice of philanthropy and unselfishness, not from any one of the many usually accepted view-points,

but as a sort of gigantic Exhibition to whose side-shows the management had somehow unaccountably and inexcusably neglected to furnish him with a complimentary ticket. He was, so to speak, a moral deadhead. Had he been a duke and a millionaire he would have left a splendid reputation. That men who were neither dukes nor millionaires must work for their share of the good things of life, and must be content even so to forego the richest viands of the feast, he would have admitted as a general rule. But it was not a rule which applied to *him.* He had a prescriptive right to anything enjoyable that happened to be going, and the rest of the world—of his particular world—had a right to such scraps of the feast as he chose to leave to them. Did he possess five pounds, anybody who wanted it was welcome to five—or even ten—shillings. Had he found himself alone with any other human creature on a rock in mid-ocean, with one loaf of bread and one jug of water between them, he would have eaten the last crumb of the loaf, drunk the last drop of the water, and would have wondered—quite honestly wondered—at the unconscionable selfishness of the other person had he dared to object. He spoke generously of all men. He was ready at any moment to do anybody any service which cost him nothing; and ready also to accept the sacrifice of anybody else's life-blood with perfect good humour and ingratitude. People dependent on such a man are likely to have a somewhat mixed and frequently rocky time of it, and such a man is not likely to make a good guide, philosopher, and friend to a boy of

twenty, ignorant of the world, vacant of any high ideal, with a strong body, strong appetites, and a feeble will. I owe him one debt, which I gratefully acknowledge. He was, at his best, a quite admirable literary craftsman, and any small literary ability I may possess received at his hands such forming and polishing as it was competent to take.

The funds resulting from Christie's Turkish expedition at last giving out, we shifted our camp to London, and settled for awhile in rooms situated near the southern end of the Hampstead Road. I have a sort of affection for that quarter of London to this day, for grimy Tottenham Court Road and the semi-squalor of its adjacent streets, whose stones are eloquent of many memories of the hours in which I first trod them in the flush of untried hope and untested courage. It was all Paradise to me then, for it was London, and Christie was there, and Christie's friends, wonderful people who wrote books and contributed to newspapers and composed music and painted pictures and acted in theatres, men who spoke familiarly of people great in all those ways of life, and who were all going one day to be great themselves. Many of them were members of a society known as "The Cousinhood of the Oasis," a club which met once a week during the winter months in a private room of some hotel to dine and pass the evening in song and conversation. They were a more than averagely clever crowd. T. P. O'Connor, then newly famous for his "Life of Beaconsfield," and recently elected to Parliament as a member for one of the divisions of the Borough of Liverpool, was one of us. Julian Hawthorne,

physically the living reproduction of the great prose-poet whose name he bears and something of whose magical glamour has descended to him, was another. Justin McCarthy was a rare but ever-welcome visitor. Robert Francillon, then in the full tide of his literary productivity; Richard Gowing, the secretary of the Cobden Club; Rudolf Blind; Archibald MacNeil, the clever young journalist who died so tragically and so mysteriously a few years later at Boulogne; Frederick Cowen; "The Great Twin Brethren," Reginald and Eugene Barnett, sons of John Barnett, composer of "The Mountain Sylph," respectively the song-writer and music-maker of the Club, the first an able journalist, the second the inheritor of no mean portion of his father's gift of melody; Joseph Williams, one of the finest pianists it has ever been my good fortune to listen to, and others whose names have since become famous, were among them. I was elected a member, and found in that circumstance a swelling pride of which to-day I might experience a feeble reproduction if I were made a Fellow of the Royal Society or a Privy Councillor.

Another interesting group were the war correspondents and doctors whom Christie had known in Turkey, with marvellous reminiscences of battles and sieges and Bulgarian massacres—men who, like Tennyson's Ulysses, were a part of all that they had seen. Of these, I remember most clearly Dick Clancy, whose appearance in the circle was hailed with as much astonishment as pleasure, for he had been mourned for many months as dead. He had been one of the surgeons attached to the army

commanded by Mehemet Ali, and had gone through a queer experience since his friends had last seen him. At some place in Roumelia he had inadvertently strayed beyond the Turkish lines, and had, as he himself quaintly expressed it, been "culled" by a Russian patrol, and taken before the General in command. The General was drunk, which appears to have been his perennial condition, and, although Clancy's papers had been perfectly satisfactory, had sentenced him to be shot as a Turkish spy. Subordinate officers had so strongly represented the unwisdom of shooting a British subject on so flimsy a pretext that the General had repented of that first intention, but had ordered poor Clancy to be taken at the tail of a bullock-cart to St. Petersburg, and months after his luckier colleagues had returned to the joys of home he had been still performing that interminable journey, at an average rate of progress of three miles or so a day, on a diet of unsalted mutton and water. He was supposed to be negotiating for vast compensation from the Russian Government, but I never heard that he got any.

Then there was Daniel O'Brien, also a doctor, who had, on the strength of a recent legacy, bought a high-class practice and taken a handsome house in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park, having to that end abandoned his former practice in the purlieus of Euston Road, where he had been wont to go his rounds among his patients clad in a flat tweed cap, a pea-jacket, and Blucher boots, with a clay pipe in his mouth, and a bull-dog of abnormal ugliness at his heels. He had discarded the pipe

and the bull-dog, and had replaced his sartorial vagaries by the silk hat, frock-coat, and patent leather shoes more commonly worn by reputable practitioners. He had an assistant, a compatriot answering to the name of Mulligan, who was one of the most remarkable-looking people I have ever beheld. He had a head which looked precisely as if it had been carved out of a gigantic cocoa-nut. It was of that colour, and the wiry hair and whiskers with which it was decorated were exactly of the tint and general appearance of cocoa-nut fibre. His face was absolutely incapable of any play of expression, you could never know from it whether he was glad or sorry, angry or pleased, drunk or sober ; and he had a squint of such curious duplicity that it was impossible to say not merely at what object, but even in what direction, he might be looking. This does not read like the description of a successful libertine, but that Mulligan had had his triumphs—or at least one triumph—in the lists of love was evidenced by the appearance several days in succession outside his employer's house of a Milesian lady of poverty-stricken appearance, who dandled in her arms an infant replica of Mulligan, squint included, and rent the air with a strident, tuneless chant of "Drunken Doctor Mulligan, come out and own your bastard." It says much for O'Brien's kindness of heart, if little for his capacity of maintaining his newly acquired respectability, that Mulligan was allowed to retain his place as his friend's assistant. The conduct of the betrayed lady might not perhaps altogether account for the failure of O'Brien's attempt at professional regeneration, but

soon after her advent the practice was abandoned and O'Brien and Mulligan went together to Argentina, where I last heard of them, several years ago, as prospering greatly.

To know one Irishman intimately pretty generally means to know many others. Calling on O'Brien one evening at his house I was shown into the surgery, and found him seated in an armchair on one side of the fireplace, confronting another person seated in another armchair on the other side of the hearth. This second person arrested my attention at once, the more so that for quite a while O'Brien took no notice of him whatsoever, but entered on the business which had occasioned my visit as openly as if we had been alone. The stranger was a man of about thirty, dressed with conspicuous shabbiness, unshaven for at least three days past, and with broken boots and dingy linen. He carried in his mouth, upside down, a short wooden pipe, from which little streams of tobacco ash trickled over his waistcoat. His eyes were open, but fixed and glassy, and a second glance told me that he was all but comatose with drink. O'Brien presently addressed him. "Wake up now, Terence, and be inthrojuiced" —enforcing the adjuration by sticking the point of his boot into the man's ribs and working it vigorously about. Thus addressed, the stranger made a paralytic attempt to straighten himself, a momentary gleam of intelligence lighted his face, and he murmured that he was "very happy." I supposed him to be one of O'Brien's innumerable eleemosynary patients, and after leaving the house

thought no more about him. A day or two later I called at the house again, and met O'Brien in the act of descending the steps. He was accompanied by a good-looking, glossily-dressed individual, neatly gloved, booted, and hatted, clean shaven, and entirely reputable. "Ye know Macartney," said O'Brien. I replied that I had not previously had that pleasure, but was delighted to make his acquaintance. "Sure, ye made it the other night," said O'Brien. "I inthrojuiced ye in the surgery." The mental struggle with which I recognised the identity of the well-groomed, gentlemanly person now before me with the squalid spectre whose memory was evoked by O'Brien's words must have been clearly visible in my face, but Macartney gave me his hand with a smile. He had a particularly charming smile, as gentle as that of a very sweet-tempered and very tired baby, with a hint of humorous deprecation somehow lurking in it. A word or two settled my business with O'Brien, who then started off on his daily round, leaving my new acquaintance and myself together. "If ye're walking," said Macartney, "we might go together." We had not gone far when Macartney proposed a drink. We entered a bar, and were served with our respective beverages, Macartney laying two sovereigns on the counter, which the attendant barmaid took up with a nod of intelligence. As is *de rigueur* on such occasions, I requited Macartney's hospitality at a bar a little further on, and here again Macartney gave the barmaid two sovereigns, also received and acknowledged with the same masonic nod. Macartney was the kind of person

one knows as well in an hour as after the acquaintance of a lifetime, and when this mysterious business had occurred a third time I inquired how it happened that he owed precisely the same sum at every house we entered. "Owe!" replied Macartney. "Sure I don't owe a penny in all London. 'Tis my way of banking, and mighty convenient. Ye see, I hardly ever go outside this beat, and so I'm never far from my money, and when it's gone my credit's good till I draw my next instalment." He had been left a competency by his father, paid to him with rigid regularity at the rate of £30 on the first of every calendar month by a lawyer who punctiliously performed the provisions of his deceased client's will, and never suffered Macartney to anticipate his pension—"not by an hour or a ha'penny," as Macartney expressed it. "I keep two sets of clothes," he explained, "and when I outrun the constable before the end of the month I wear the togs you met me in the other night, and send these I'm wearing now to the pawnbroker." He seemed to see nothing in the least degree odd or out of the way in this curious method of life. He was a gentleman to the tips of his fingers, in any and every stage of alcoholism or sobriety, with a delightful, spontaneous charm of manner, and he was extremely well-connected, a maternal uncle being a high dignitary of the Roman Church. His one weak spot was his insatiable craving for alcohol. He must have had a superb physique, for he told me, in a fashion as far removed from braggadocio as from shame, merely as a casual statement, that he

had not gone to bed sober since he had left school ; but, except when actually intoxicated, he showed not the slightest symptom of this ruinous enslavement. He had no hopes, no ambitions, no regrets, but carried himself with a quiet, even, modest cheerfulness. The one thing he cared for in the world except brandy was O'Brien, and when the latter migrated, as already said, to Argentina with Mulligan, Macartney went also. The last I heard of him was contained in a phrase of a letter of O'Brien's—"Terence is doing splendidly, and will do better yet, if I can only persuade him that Martell's Three Star, taken neat by the tumbler, is not the best temperance beverage for a tropical climate."

Macartney is associated in my mind with one curious reminiscence. We were strolling in the promenade of the Alhambra one evening, when we came face to face with a woman who was obviously an habituée of the place. I might have passed her unregarded had it not been so evident from the manner of both that she and Macartney knew each other, and that there was in common between them some sentiment or emotion of no common kind. She was a handsome woman, with a thin, haggard face and an unhealthy, unnatural glitter in her eyes. As her glance fell on my companion she started violently, and seemed for a moment on the point of addressing him, but suddenly averted her face and hurried past. "That's devilish odd," said Macartney to himself; "a queer coincidence entirely. It's six months and more since I've seen that woman," he continued, "and 'twas on this very spot I saw

her last. Do you remember," he asked, after a pause, "a young Catholic priest attached to the chapel in —— Street, that cut his throat, leaving a confession behind him saying why he'd done it?" I remembered the case perfectly. It had been a tragedy with which all London had rung for a day or two a few months previously. The poor young priest, little more than a boy in years, had stated in his confession that he had been false to his priestly vow, and was no longer fit to live, and had added a passionate prayer that the woman who had ruined him here and hereafter might be pardoned her atrocious sin. "That was the woman," said Macartney. "The night it happened she came in here, and 'twas on this very spot where we're now standing, that she told me—gloating over her triumph, the hell-cat—that she'd 'got round' poor —— at last. I told her—well, never mind what I said to her. I was bred a Catholic, whatever I may be now, which perhaps is a point I'm not altogether clear on. I told her what I thought of her, anyhow, and she went away laughing at me and calling me a spooney and a milksop. Poor ——'s suicide was in the papers next night, and his blood is on that woman's head. She knows it, too—she's just withering with remorse, and she's drinking like a fish—don't I know the symptoms?" I never saw the woman again, but I shall remember her face as she recognised Macartney as long as I remember anything.

It was at a somewhat later period that I made the acquaintance of another Irishman. He had no

connection with the little band of eccentrics with whom I have just been dealing, nor, indeed, with any set of people, but was one of the most solitary creatures I have ever known. He was curiously diminutive in figure, with a disproportionately large head. His features in youth must have been markedly handsome. They still expressed a keen intellectuality, and his eyes, in moments of interest, were as lambent as a dog's. His general expression was one of intense but patient suffering. We had been indifferent acquaintances for many months when I got my first glimpse into his history and real character. I went one night, a minute or two before twelve o'clock, into a bar in New Oxford Street—the place is a second-hand book-shop now—and found him sitting on a high stool, his right hand curled round a tumbler of whisky, and in his left a watch, which he was regarding with an intense and hungry stare. "Hullo, D——," I exclaimed. "How are you?" "Hould your whisht!" he growled in answer, still with his gaze riveted on the dial. The finger crawled slowly to the hour, the watch slid into his pocket, and the contents of the tumbler were transferred to his stomach with a horrible avidity. "Give me another of those," he said to the attendant. "Look here," he continued to me, "my address is——. Just remember that, and see me into a cab when this place closes." I had no need to ask an explanation of this curious conduct, he volunteered it in the intervals of swallowing glass on glass of spirit with incredible rapidity. The liquor he was now drinking was the first he had tasted for two years, "all owing," he

said, "to the —— Cyardinal," by which disrespectful term he meant to indicate Henry Edward Manning, who, it appeared, was his life-long friend. Manning, as all the world knows, was a fervent public advocate of temperance, and, as all the world is far from knowing, gave himself an infinity of trouble to redeem victims of the drink habit in whom he took an especial private interest. D—— was one of those unfortunates, and for years past his fanatical love and admiration of the great prelate had been the one anchor which had kept him from drifting to irremediable ruin. From time to time he gave the Cardinal a six months' pledge, binding himself to take no alcohol whatsoever during that period, and he had given a perpetual promise that he would keep none about him, that no sort of intoxicant should ever enter the rooms in which he lived. This was the explanation of his furious eagerness to take advantage of the half-hour now at his disposal. "That blasted ould black vulture," —which was D.'s way of referring to the Cardinal's clerical secretary, Father——, would be at his bedside next morning with another pledge for him to sign, and this was the first time in two whole years he had been able to dodge him, either he or the Cardinal having succeeded four successive times in anticipating, by at least a day, the expiry of the agreement. D—— had been originally, like Manning himself, a Protestant, and had followed his great idol into the Roman fold. He told me that he owed all that he possessed, and life itself, to the Cardinal, who had kept him from the drink and found him employment in a dozen ways, mainly as

a contributor to Roman Catholic journals and in historical research. He was a man of great natural talent and of really remarkable learning, especially in the classics, the Fathers of the Church, and Italian literature. I remember that one night he challenged me to read a line from the "Divina Commedia," to which he could not provide the context, and after trying for half an hour I did not find him once at fault. How old he was, I never knew, but he spoke familiarly of famous people who had been dead for many years. He had known Coleridge—not, alas! the Coleridge Shelley described in his letter to Maria Gisborne—

> "he who sat obscure
> In the exceeding lustre and the pure
> Intense irradiation of a mind,
> Which, with its own internal lustre blind,
> Flagged wearily through darkness and despair—
> A cloud-encircled meteor of the air,
> A hooded eagle among blinking owls"—

but an obese, grey-haired, unvenerable old figure, writing journalistic slip-slop for a daily paper, shuffling about the Strand in shapeless list slippers, and pouring out his marvellous accumulations of thought and scholarship on anybody who would stand him twopenn'orth of gin.

It is extremely curious to note how exactly, in many important particulars, a man's life is the result of physical peculiarities which might, to a careless observer, pass as absolutely negligible. My own career has, I am convinced, been deeply influenced by the fact that I have practically no sense of smell,

and, consequently, only a faint sense of taste. I know men to whom a delicate dish or a high-class wine are what a sonorous verse was to Keats, what a flush of sunset colour was to Turner, what the exquisitely flowing line of a shapely woman's bust and shoulder must have been to Praxiteles or Canova. To me, it is nothing. I eat only to satisfy hunger, and drink merely to quench thirst, or for the enjoyment of the quickened pulse and brightened fancy alcohol has the power to give. My conception of a good dinner is a well-cooked steak and a pot of stout, and I prefer American cigarettes at ten for twopence-ha'penny to the choicest nicotian product of Asia Minor. Early training may very likely have indurated this plebeian coarseness of palate. There was always plenty to eat at home, but the menu was almost as simple as that of Pope's cockney tradesman—

> "One solid dish his week-day meal affords,
> An added pudding solemnised the Lord's."

Another physical peculiarity of mine—or so I have been assured by a high scientific authority—is that my heart is slightly too big for my body. The result is that I am—or rather was, for increasing years have made a difference—much less pervious to cold than most other people. I never had the dandy instinct, and never, in my most prosperous times, cared to be anything more than physically clean and sartorially unremarkable. Now, it is the most obvious of economic truisms that a solitary man works only for the ability to satisfy his personal needs, and the more Nature diminishes the number

or the intensity of those needs the less work he will do, unless he is affected by that curious sporadic imbecility which finds delight in labour for its own sake. And that is not one of my many weaknesses. I loathe labour, and love idleness. I have known spells of furious effort in my time, but that was when I have been so obsessed by some idea that life was a torment until I had managed to get my inspiration fixed on paper. Bereft of that spur to effort I work, as my immortal compatriot joked, "wi' deefficulty." A poor man to whom delicate food is a necessity will work harder than one to whom it is indifferent. A poor man to whom thick underclothing and a well-lined overcoat are necessities of existence, or who yearns to shine in splendid raiment, must work to satisfy his needs or his tastes. (Balzac wrote the tragedy of the over-educated palate in "Cousin Pons." An equal genius might perhaps find as great a book in the life of a poverty-stricken dandy.) I have had neither of these incentives to labour. Had I had them I might have worked harder—I might even have beaten my luck, and arrived at a measure of wealth and consideration I can now never hope to know.

Physical needs are, of course, by no means the only spurs to intellectual effort. The love of money and the desire of fame are frequent and potent incentives. But they also have failed me. My carelessness of money—I might almost call it a sort of chemical antipathy between myself and the medium of exchange, I have so flung away and spurned the precious metals whenever I have had

the opportunity—is ineradicable. I have tried many methods of self-cure, but in vain. One means seemed for a time to have succeeded. I took to hoarding coins, a heterogenous mixture of bronze, silver, and gold, in a drawer, hoping thereby to arouse in myself the miserly instinct which gloats over such accumulations. I denied myself even books and tobacco for the pleasure of adding to my secret pile, and began to flatter myself that the true spirit of Harpagon was entering into me. But the moment inevitably came when some sudden temptation triumphed over my acquired miserliness. My incapacity either to make or to hold money is congenital. My father had, as I never had, the means of acquiring wealth actually under his hand, but, after a life of work and worry he only just shaved the Insolvent Court. For years he had the only printing-office in a rapidly-growing town, but his one preoccupation as a tradesman was to fulfil any order he received at the lowest possible price. This curious ineptness in business was, even more curiously, accompanied by a genuine talent for finance on the great scale. I have heard him at a political meeting criticise the Imperial Budget of the year in a speech of over an hour's duration, in the course of which he reviewed the fluctuations of taxation and revenue, and the expenditure of previous governments, quoting dates and figures with marvellous fluency and accuracy, and without so much as a note to help him. The needs of a swarm of children forced him to industry, but he was temperamentally the idlest of men—so idle that he would rather sit for hours chewing the stem of an

empty pipe than take the trouble to fill it. Of ambition he had not a particle. I am his true son in that respect also, with a slight difference. In my early days I did most strongly desire what still seems to me by far the sweetest morsel success has to offer—the recognition of the best and greatest of my fellow-craftsmen. To have been hailed as a brother by the artists I loved and honoured, to have been received as the peer of Tennyson and Browning, of Meredith and Zola, I would have given and suffered much. That dream faded very early, not long after the date at which I began to work really in earnest, and it can seem hardly more hopeless to my most unfriendly critic than it does to myself at this time of day. I fancy I know my own intellectual stature fairly well. I stand almost as high as the underside of Zola's ankle-bone, and am at least as tall as the sole of Meredith's shoe is thick. And for "fame" as it is ordinarily understood, to be talked about by people whose faces I shall never see, to be a household word within the arctic circle and under the tropics, was an idea which never quickened my pulse by a single beat per minute.

I have had during my life one luxury which to me was a necessity, and without which life would not be worth living at all—books. And books are nowadays—thank the kindly Fates—the cheapest of all luxuries. To dine with Apicius or to be seen in the Park with Alcibiades are costly pleasures. You must repay the hospitality of Apicius with dinners as good, or nearly as good, as his own; you must dress up to, or within measurable

distance of, the Prince of Dandies ere he will tolerate your society. But for a few shillings you can gather together in one glorious company the poets and sages and humorists of all time under the poorest roof that ever failed to keep out the rain. It was Gibbon who said that he would not barter his love of reading for the wealth of India, and I think it was also Gibbon who declared that he had never known a trouble he could not forget over a book. I can heartily repeat and endorse both statements.

With such a temperament, and cast, a raw young yokel of twenty, into the vortex of Bohemian life with no wise hand to guide me, it is less matter for surprise than for regret that the first years of my time in London were absolutely fooled away, at some cost to health, and at a much greater cost to possessions even better worth preserving. I am not going to pull a long face and preach a sermon, or to deny that I look back on that wasted time with a good deal of pleasure. I hurt nobody but myself, and myself not very much. In the twenties, wine—or such cheaper substitutes as came my way—was sweet, women were kissable, and ginger of many flavours and qualities was hot in the mouth. I hunted pleasure as and how I could, and youth, in that market, is current coin, and buys vastly more than gold can command. The youngster who can only get a bottle or a kiss by paying money down for it is a dull dog. I wish, not that I had taken less pleasure, but that I had done more work. I regret, not that I have loved many women, but that I did not earlier find the one

woman I could love sufficiently to take her for a life-companion, and, with her beside me, face the realities of existence as the wiser among my contemporaries did. My memories of the Primrose Path are pleasant, and if I lingered in it longer than was wise, the gods were good to me, in that they turned my steps to safer ways before I had arrived at the precipice in which, for so many, it ends. They were good to me also in my least regenerate days, for they sent me women-friends of another sort than those with whom perhaps too much of my time was spent, and gave me at least the grace to appreciate their quieter charm. Good feminine society—once again, thank the kindly Fates—is not a costly luxury. The society of the women best worth knowing certainly costs next to nothing at all. A weekly expenditure of a few shillings on a laundress and a few coppers on a bootblack will ensure any young man of passable manners and appearance the entrée to the circle of as many amiable and clever women as he can need to know, even if his coat be a little—or more than a little—shabby. I was poor indeed if I could not manage a clean shirt and a street-corner shine on Sunday, and so fortified could feel myself the welcome guest of more than one lady whom it was a dear privilege to know, and especially of one. It is more than twenty years since I have seen her face, since a cruel caprice of Fate broke the happy circle of which she was the centre, since I entered the neat room, with its little rosewood piano, its sober rows of books, its pretty trifles of ivory and glass and bronze, its good, incommunicable odour of

peace, and quiet, and honest friendliness, in which she held her little court. Others than the happy band I knew there tenant the little room now, the last echo of the music she made for us has died away, the kind faces are scattered, some of the friendly voices have passed into the eternal silence, and the Lady sits, with Grief for a companion, in other places that I shall not know.

Among other memories of feminine friendship which were entirely for good in their influence on my undeveloped character, let that of Marie Poncelet find a place. (That was not her real name.) Marie takes rank as one of the prettiest girls it was ever my good luck to meet, and I see her now as I saw her first, standing beside the piano set in the light of the big window of E. B.'s sitting-room on the first-floor of a house in South Crescent, Store Street, Tottenham Court Road—a vanished landmark. Set on her mass of jet-black curls, and heightening the fire of her big black eyes, is a scarlet velvet Tam-o'-Shanter, and her figure, suggesting a statuette fresh from the hand of some consummate artist, shows its perfect lines under a jersey of navy blue. She is trilling, in a sweet, reedy thread of a voice, like the evening song of an immature throstle, the pretty French ballad, "La Première Feuille," to E. B.'s accompaniment, and nine-and-twenty years have rolled away from my shoulders, and I am young again.

Marie owed to Providence certain good and enviable gifts, her beauty, which was her stock-in-trade as an artists' model and figurante, her

touching little thread of a voice, an unconquerable merry courage which I never saw for one moment depressed, and very little else. To know her parents was to wonder what kindly freak of atavism had produced so lovely a flower from so unpromising a soil. Her father was a Dutchman of French extraction, and by trade a cobbler. He was also a furious drunkard. Out of his cups there was not much the matter with him except an invincible aversion to soap : in them, his most marked characteristic was a horrible desire to kill or mutilate his daughter. On one occasion he had awaited her home-coming, hidden behind the street door armed with his lapstone. A fellow-lodger in the house was a young brazier, well known later in sporting circles as a middle-weight pugilist, and at that date fast rising into fame as a brilliant amateur. The fond father made the grievous error of mistaking this person for Marie, and landed him on the top of his hat—fortunately a hard and high one—with the lapstone. I am happy to record that the rising young pugilist damaged the nice old gentleman rather severely, and sorry to say that Marie nursed him with the tenderest care through his consequent dilapidations. On another occasion years earlier, while Marie was the most popular child-model in London, her father had held her down on the sofa with the expressed intention of picking out her eyes with a steel fork. He was restrained from that enterprise by Marie's mother, whose outraged maternity found vent in these remarkable words—"You —— old fool, if you spoil the girl's looks, where's our living coming from?" The artless

appeal went straight home to the paternal heart, and Marie's sight was spared.

Such were Marie's parents, and for them the good, brave child worked with perfect cheerfulness, giving them by far the greater part of her earnings as model and ballet-girl, and keeping the two rooms she shared with them on the top-floor of the squalid house in Windmill Street as neat as hands could make them. She could at any moment have left their horrible society and their sordid surroundings for comfort and affluence, but at a price which neither gold nor love could pay. It was Marie's quaint and pathetic ambition "to marry a gentleman," and to do that she held that she must "go straight"—she pronounced it "strite," for although she spoke French very prettily her English was the English of the quasi-slum in which her life had been passed. It was a simple ambition, and a simple ethic, but it sufficed, and I do not believe that all the gold ever coined could have bought Marie's virtue. And I have met loads of women who wouldn't have known her who have not done nearly so much to cleanse my ideal of womanhood and fortify my faith in human nature as Marie Poncelet, the Dutch-cockney artists' model and ballet-girl.

Marie and I became sweethearts. If my young and ardent imagination had ever pictured us in a less moral relationship her forthright plainness of speech soon corrected my delusion. Kisses there were in plenty—Marie frankly confessed that she loved kissing—but it stopped at that. Together we haunted the Thames steamers and Kew Gardens and the Parks and Hampstead Heath and the pits

and galleries of many theatres and music halls. We held cheap revel, when my funds permitted, at the "Welsh Harp" which is "'Endon way," as my friend Albert Chevalier tells us in his delightful ballad, of which bards of loftier name might well envy the mirth and tenderness, and at the "Bull and Bush." How juicy were the chops, how good the beer, how verdant the watercresses, of those humble feasts in the green arbours of those suburban hostelries.

Marie was a clever girl, and knew a good deal of human nature—especially of masculine human nature. Rigidly virtuous as she was, she yet recognised that a pretty woman's capital is not entirely expressed by the number of the pence in her purse. I remember a little incident illustrative of her harmless impudence and innocent guile. We were returning to Town together, dog-tired after a long day's ramble in the country between the Heath and Harrow-on-the-Hill, when, outside the Spaniard's, we saw an empty four-wheeled cab. As we approached, the cabman issued from the bar, drawing the back of his hand across his mouth, like a man refreshed. "We'll take that cab," said Marie. I pointed out that our common funds amounted to a poor fourteen-pence. "All right," said Marie. "Stay 'ere a minute in the shadder." I obeyed, and she advanced, with exaggerated symptoms of fatigue. The cabman had mounted the box and gathered up the reins. "Are you going back into Town?" asked Marie. "Yes, Missie," said the cabman. "Oh, I wonder if you'd give me a lift? I *am* so tired." "Why, o' course

I will," said the cabman. "You look fit to drop. Jump in, an' welcome." "And you won't mind my friend coming too, will you?" asked the abominable little serpent, producing me from the shadow. I can see them now, Marie and the cabman, she looking up at him with big, trustful eyes, he looking down at us with surprise and disgust slowly giving way on his broad, red face before his honest appreciation of her clever impudence. "Well, may I ——" he began, and then grinned outright. "You little snike in the grarss!" he chuckled. "You've copped me fair. Skip in, the pair of you." And Marie, with her tired head drooping on my shoulder, laughed softly to herself until she fell asleep.

The ever-rolling, silent hours, whose furtive flight have made an elderly man of me, and—how much more cruel!—an old woman of Marie, parted us, and since those bright days I have only twice seen her. On the first of those occasions she was brilliantly happy, for she had accomplished the dream of her life. She had married a gentleman, and the world had nothing more to yield her—except the "linkèd sweetness, long drawn out," of slaving herself to the bone to maintain him and his children. He was indubitably a gentleman, the younger son of a landless baronet of ancient family, and the most placidly incompetent and amiably selfish person that ever drew breath. "You can't think 'ow good he is," she told me. Twelve years later, when Robert Buchanan and myself had taken the Opéra Comique and were rehearsing *The Society Butterfly*, the stage-door keeper one morning brought to me a slip of paper, bearing in

pencil the one word "Marie." I ran up to the hall, and found there a little, elderly woman, a monument of shabbiness, faded, wrinkled, with threads of grey in her hair. I know that my amazement and disappointment were readable in my face, and have often wanted to get outside my own body and kick myself for it. "I saw your name in the paper," said Marie, "and I thought you wouldn't mind me callin'." It was like holding parley with a ghost. It was the same clear, birdlike voice, but all the old fresh, frank gaiety had gone. "Is there any chance for me in the piece, 'Arry?" I could only say, as was indeed the case, that there was absolutely nothing for her. "Well, better luck next time," said Marie. "I 'ope you'll 'ave a real big success. You 'aven't forgot the old times. I can see that in your face." "You have been ill, I am afraid," I said. She nodded. "Typhoid. Just out of the 'ospital—the Middlesex. They thought as I was goin' under, the doctor told me, *mais ne claque pas qui veut*—though I shouldn't say that. There's the kids. Six of 'em." "And your husband?" "Dead, two years ago." "Don't let us lose sight of each other now we have met again," I said. "Write to me here." She promised, and so we parted. She never wrote, and I have never seen her since.

To a little later period belong my memories of Captain Talbot—which is neither the real name nor the real rank in the army of the person of whom I speak. I met him through my brother, who had made his acquaintance in Turkey, where Talbot had occupied a post as officer of the gendarmerie. He was a grey, mild-mannered, careworn looking

man, obese, slow of speech, and diffident of manner, as little like the conventional military hero as one could easily imagine. Yet he was a V.C., and had accomplished many deeds of quiet and desperate valour. Christie having gone abroad, I was left in London on my own resources, and Talbot being as hard up as myself we made a ménage of it, and took a double-bedded room in Euston Street. Talbot had a small pension, and I earned an occasional guinea or two by a short story or a set of verses, and we got along somehow, although on more than one occasion we had only one coat and waistcoat between us. Since Talbot was much the bigger man that coat and waistcoat were of course his, and when I wore them it was a case of David in Saul's armour.

Talbot, the most friendly of men, was also one of the most reticent, and we had lived together for some months before I learned the details of a story as sad as any I have ever heard or read. Returning home one evening, I saw, standing at the corner of Euston Street, a lady. Ladies on foot are not common objects in that neighbourhood, and I looked at her with some interest in passing. The house in which I lived with Talbot was only a few yards from the spot on which she stood, and as I inserted my latchkey, I saw that she was watching me with obvious interest. I thought for a moment that she was about to address me, and turned towards her, but she wheeled abruptly and passed out of sight. The little incident had quite left my mind when, on a night a week or so later, on entering our room, I found Talbot sitting at the

table with his head between his hands, so absorbed that he took no note of my entrance. The cheap oil-lamp was alight, and I saw, lying on the table, a large panel photograph—a portrait of the lady I had seen at the corner of the street. I could not repress an exclamation of surprise. It roused him. "Ah, young 'un," he said. "You are back again. I was just looking at my wife's portrait, and thinking. Thinking of old times." I had known vaguely that he was a married man, but he had never spoken of his married life to me before, and I, of course, had respected his silence. "A pretty woman, isn't she?" With some natural doubt and trepidation, I told him of the glimpse I had recently had of the original of the portrait in the street outside. He nodded calmly, and taking the photograph from my hand, put it into the chest-of-drawers, and lay down on his bed. It was a full half-hour before he spoke again. "I'll tell you about it, if you'd care to hear," he said then; and the story he told me was as follows :—

He had married, at three-and-twenty, the daughter of a General Officer. Fifteen months later, a child, a boy, was born, and a month after that event Talbot had been ordered abroad, to India. Circumstances not merely prevented his wife accompanying him, but again and again intervened to prevent her joining him. They were apart for nearly four years, and then, to the indescribable joy of both, he was ordered home again. He assured me that during the whole of that time he was absolutely faithful to his marriage vow. I believe the statement implicitly, for I have seldom known a

more truthful man. On his way home he touched at Brindisi. There, in the hotel at which he put up, he met a certain woman. He did not mention her name, but spoke of her simply as an old acquaintance with whom, previous to his marriage, he had had intimate amatory relations. His wife arrived in Brindisi early on the following morning. She had come without warning him, in order to give him a joyful surprise. She saw him and the other woman together in circumstances which could leave no doubt as to their momentary relation, and she then and there repudiated and cast him off. He had pleaded with her as a coward might plead for life. He had sworn to her that the cruelty of circumstance had betrayed him in the one moment of weakness he had known in four long, dreary years of solitude, but all in vain. They had met since some half-dozen times in the presence of witnesses —never alone—to discuss business in the interests of their boy, but that was all the communication they had had together. She had sent him various sums of money anonymously from time to time—her people were wealthy—but he had sent them back, and as she never repudiated the gifts, he was certain they had come from her.

I took heart of grace to try if matters were not mendable. I pointed out that the anonymous gifts, and her presence in the street on the night I had seen her—he had caught sight of her himself on more than one occasion hovering near other places in which he had lived—were hopeful signs that she had repented of her harshness. Rather than that two people who loved each other should drag out

their lives so miserably apart, would it not be well for him—was it not his duty as having first offended—to make some overture towards reconciliation? "No," he said, with a quiet sternness which I felt to be unshakeable. He neither denied nor extenuated his offence, but the first step must be made by his wife. It never was made by either.

I have other memories, less tragic, associated with poor Talbot, one of which shall be set down here. As I have already stated, he had a pension, which was paid quarterly. For some days before one of those payments was due, our funds had fallen to zero, and a little bread-shop, which sometimes permitted us to run a very small credit-account, refused further supplies. On the last day our diet was atmospheric air, *au naturel*, and water. On the long-expected and much wished-for morning Talbot assumed "the reliever," as we called the one coat we had between us, and sallied out to touch his money, promising to return with supplies of provender before one o'clock. One o'clock came, but brought no Talbot, and the afternoon and evening dragged their interminable length along until, clean worn out with hunger and hope deferred, I lay down on my bed and went to sleep. I was wakened by a shock of sound, and, lighting the lamp—it had grown quite dark by this time—discovered Talbot lying on the floor in a condition of hopeless collapse. Assisting him to undress, I got him into bed, and then went through his clothes, but there was not a coin in his pockets. On my demanding an explanation he would say nothing but that it was "all ri'—qui' ri'—" and that "the

money was in the wall." He repeated this amazing statement several times with an air of great triumph, and finally fell asleep.

In the morning, the mystery—or rather the two mysteries, for that so good a fellow and so loyal a chum as Talbot should have gone on a burst with a hungry friend waiting for him at home was in itself a most mysterious thing—was explained. While drawing his pension, he had met an old fellow-campaigner, who had offered him a glass of wine. Poor Talbot, who had no more head for liquor at the best of times than a baby, had accepted, and from the moment the wine had fallen into his poor empty stomach remembered nothing at all. "What did you mean," I asked him, "by saying that the money was 'in the wall'?" My query lit a partial gleam of memory. "Yes," he said feebly. "I remember now. I came across a wall somewhere or other, and there was a big crack in it, and I put the money in the crack." "But where *is* the wall?" I asked. "I'll be shot if I know," he said, clutching his hair helplessly, and there for some time the matter rested.

Readers of Wilkie Collins's clever story, "The Moonstone," will remember the fashion in which a mystery regarding the hiding-place of a great jewel is solved. The stone has been hidden by a man in an over-wrought nervous condition, and under the influence of a narcotic. Months after, having induced precisely similar circumstances, he remembers where he hid the missing gem. It occurred to me that if I could get Talbot into the same state of mind as that in which he had hidden

his pension-money he might remember the situation of the wall to which he had confided it. So, next time we possessed the necessary funds, I took him out and made him drunk. But the psychological experiment was an utter failure. I have not often seen a more comically doleful exhibition than was presented by Talbot, shaking the tears of maudlin desperation off his nose, and singing, in a kind of plaintive chant, "I can *see* the damned wall, but I do' no where it is!"

Life is made up of meetings and partings, and Talbot and I ceased to be companions, although we remained close friends. He was unlucky to the end, and unluckiest of all at the very end. An old comrade who had started a military cramming establishment took him as assistant. The school throve exceedingly, and Talbot's friend, who was a childless widower without a relative in the world, promised Talbot that he should succeed to the business. And then, after a brief glimpse of at least a spell of ease and comfort to atone for so long a time of poverty and heart-break so bravely borne, poor Talbot died.

The incident of Talbot hiding his pension-money in the wall reminds me of two other little occurrences of a similar sort, which happened years earlier, when, as a boy of seventeen, I first lived in London for a brief time with Christie. His house-chum at that period was the clever and genial young Irish artist who figures in his novel, "A Model Father," as "Bill Cassidy," a name which may also do service here. The common stock of tobacco had given out, when Cassidy bethought

him of an old lidless jar of terra-cotta, stowed away on the top shelf of a cupboard in his bedroom. "I believe I left half-a-dozen pipefuls in it," he said as he mounted a chair to take down the jar. The half-dozen pipefuls were there, sure enough, and under the layer of tobacco were four sovereigns. On another occasion, when we could barely muster a sixpence between us, we made an inventory of our properties to determine which among them should go to the pawnbroker. The article best spareable —it was hot summer weather—was a heavy ulster belonging to Christie. Going over it in search of any odd trifles its pockets might contain, he found in the little ticket-pocket in the cuff of the left sleeve, a five-pound note.

Certain acquaintances I made at about this time are worthy at least of a passing mention here. One of the most interesting among them was a certain Anatole Cherière—that was not his name, nor in the least degree like it. He was of mixed nationality, his father having been a French artist of considerable reputation, and his mother an Irish lady. He spoke both languages with perfect ease and grammatical correctness, and wrote both sufficiently well to contribute to leading French and English journals, but his pronunciation of English was a curious mingling of Gallic and Hibernian accents. At the time I first met him he was acting as London correspondent of an important Paris paper. He was a thoroughly charming and a thoroughly good fellow, with no vice worse than an unconquerable idleness, but for which his really

considerable talents might have carried him far. His appointment as correspondent had rescued him from a long spell of unremunerative poverty, and had inspired him with a momentary love of labour and desire for respectability. He had taken a house in Acacia Road, Brixton, and I have often wondered, and wonder still, what the ultra-British bourgeois who forms the staple of the inhabitants of that region must have thought of him and his family, who might have been transported bodily out of the pages of Henri Murger or Paul de Kock. His wife, who, like his mother, was Irish, was that curious and rare phenomenon, an extraordinarily pretty woman *minus* that moderate dose of healthy vanity which makes most of her sex careful to supplement their charms by the legitimate artifices of the toilet. She had a mass of splendid hair, which generally looked as if it had recently served as a substitute for a hearth-broom. She had a fine bust, of which the beholder was advertised by a constant lack of hooks and eyes or buttons on the upper part of her dress. She was the sort of woman a shy man would have shunned to go abroad with on a windy day for fear of seeing every stitch of clothing blown off her. She had two children, a little girl of three, as beautiful as a baby angel, and a noble little boy of five. When I first made their acquaintance, at four o'clock p.m. of a nipping day in early spring, they were making mud-pies in the middle of the horse-road in their nightgowns. The house was of a piece with its inhabitants. There was a common red-legged deal kitchen-table in the drawing-room, and a handsome sculptured

oak ditto in the kitchen, but as most of the cooking was done in the first-named apartment, that arrangement was really less eccentric than it might otherwise have seemed. There was a brass coal-scuttle on the hearthrug, but it was full of water, on which were floating the wrecks of some paper boats, and the coals were contained in Anatole's waste-paper basket. The room was full of smoke, owing to some defect in the chimney, and the window by which it escaped—which was broken—was propped open by a handsomely framed engraving of Meissonier's picture, "La Rixe." To have used any article merely for the purpose for which the manufacturer had intended it would have seemed a pitiable subterfuge to the soaring genius of Madame Anatole. At her hospitable board I have helped myself to butter from a coffee-cup and to salt from a soap-dish, and I have seen her, within the space of one minute, exact service as a paper-cutter and a toothpick from an insignificant bit of metal which the ordinary woman would have regarded only as a hair-pin. I have seen her stir a potful of soup, boiling on the drawing-room fire, with a shoe-horn, and I have eaten my share of that same soup out of a pie-dish, what time the maid-of-all-work was sent out to fetch a quart of bitter beer from the neighbouring public-house in a celery-glass. Just as Anatole was occasionally assailed by passing spasms of industry, Madame would be suddenly inspired to dress herself with more or less propriety, and I met her one afternoon in Regent Street so beautifully got up that you might have taken her for a Duchess, if only her

gloves had been of the same colour and she hadn't been eating a banana.

Not long after my introduction to this quaint and delightful household Anatole's mother died, and he mourned her with the passionate regret natural to an affectionate heart belonging to so typical a Frenchman. She had left him a little hoard of ready money, which went to the winds in no time, and several personal mementoes, which he clung to ardently, and only parted with at the pinch of dire necessity. Among them was a collection of Sèvres and Dresden china figures, of which sort of bric-à-brac the old lady had been an admirable judge. Whereby hangs a tale. The Parisian journal had given Anatole the sack, the only wonder about that being that he had not received it months earlier. The sluttish plenty in which his regular salary and the windfall of his mother's legacy had enabled him and Madame Anatole to live was seriously curtailed before he could make up his mind to part with any relic of "la mère," but needs must, and one morning he came into Town with a beautiful little Louis Quinze shepherdess in his pocket. He took it to a famous pawnbroker's establishment in the Strand, and laid it on the counter. "How much?" asked the clerk. "Three pounds," replied Anatole. The clerk, who was the mere average cockney, and no judge of any kind of object of art, thought Anatole was "guying" him, and declined to consider the proposition. "If you don't know your business," said Anatole, "ask Mr. ——," naming the head of the establishment. Mr. —— being called, examined the statuette and

ordered the clerk to make out the ticket at the sum demanded. The rest of the pretty little figures speedily followed in the same direction, and after several squabbles, all ended by the personally delivered verdict of Mr. ——, it at last got beaten into the clerk's head that the insignificant little articles proffered from time to time by the "furrin gent" were really valuable. Then came the day on which the last of the cherished relics of maternal affection had followed the rest, and the money, save one solitary sixpence, had all been spent. Anatole and I were wandering disconsolate along the Strand, when we came to a shop—it stood almost exactly opposite the great pawnbroking establishment—which had its window full of all sorts of trumpery trifles, with a card bearing in large letters the legend, "All at 6*d.*" Anatole's eye dwelt, vacantly wistful, on this inscription, and immediately lightened with a flash of genius. "*Nom de nom de nom de nom de Dieu, mon ami, quelle inspiration! Viens donc!*" He plunged into the shop, selected from among the heterogeneous trash on the counter the least shapeless lump of porcelain, daubed with the least hideously discordant colours, and paid his sixpence. Then he darted across the street, disappeared into the pawnshop, and emerged radiant two minutes later. "How much?" I asked, faint with admiration of his splendid audacity. "Three pounds," he answered. It is a terrible confession, no doubt, but it is a fact that I made myself *particeps criminis* to this particularly impudent specimen of the confidence trick to the extent of lunching on the proceeds of the fraud.

Anatole's end was as tragic as his life was merry. He went out to the States as acting-manager of a troupe of French comedians, and for a time I heard of him now and then as doing extremely well, and at last as running a company of his own in a piece of his own writing. Then he vanished altogether from my ken, and many years passed before I again heard his name. He had wandered to some semi-civilised region of California, and had somehow fallen into desperate feud with a well-known dangerous character who publicly proclaimed his intention of "finishing" him on the earliest opportunity. Anatole was not a man to be easily frightened. He had proved his contempt of death in fashions which had won him more than one military decoration during the Franco-German War of 1870. He bought a revolver, and, save for that precaution, took no overt note of his enemy's threats. They came face to face one night unexpectedly in a saloon. The enemy drew his pistol, Anatole drew his ; they fired simultaneously, and fell dead each across the body of the other.

It was at some time about this period that a certain sombre little incident, of which I have often thought since, and which I shall never forget, occurred. It was the depth of a severe winter, not long before the New Year. I had taken a room on the ground-floor of a house situated in one of the innumerable shabby streets off the eastern side of Tottenham Court Road. The house was full of other lodgers of whom I knew nothing, and saw almost as little, the basement was tenanted by

the landlord and his wife. The former was a huge giant of a man, standing well over six feet in height, a veritable colossus, with a face hard as if hewn out of granite, and with one unchanging expression, of a sort of cold and bitter rage against things in general. His wife was a timid, shrinking, almost voiceless creature, who glided about the house like a shadow. My stay under their roof was a very brief one, but it was long enough for me to learn that their strongest idiosyncrasy—or rather *his*, for the woman had no proper existence of her own, and was merely a dumb echo of her husband, if the phrase be permissible—was a sour, narrow, fierce religiosity. There was a Baptist chapel near at hand, of which they were constant attendants, and whose minister was their frequent visitor. Every night and morning the floor of my room used to shake in harmony with a continuous, hollow, thunderous growl, in which the giant poured out his matinal and nocturnal supplications at what he probably called the Throne of Grace, tenanted, I fear, by some Being as ungracious as ever lent ear to the petitions of a South Sea islander or a Calvinist Scot.

I had been in the house about a month when, towards two o'clock one morning, I was making my way homeward through as heavy a snowstorm as ever fell on London. The soundless streets were muffled to deadest silence, and the huge, persistent flakes were so thick that they blotted out the gas-lamps at only a few yards distance. As I came to the corner of the street in which I lived I almost ran against the figure of a woman standing there.

She was as moveless, and as white from head to foot, as the pillar of salt which had once been Lot's wife; and Lot's wife herself, standing alone in the desert after her transformation, could hardly have looked more forlorn or desolate. She started so violently at my appearance that the flakes with which she was coated made a sort of miniature snowstorm of their own about her. I murmured a word of apology, and had made a dozen steps upon my homeward way when I was arrested by the woman's voice. "Sir, oh, sir!" Few as the words were there was a world of meaning in them, and in the desperate, eager gasp in which they were spoken, and I knew that they had risen many times to her lips that night before they had at last got themselves addressed to me. Conversation in such conditions is apt to be brief, pregnant, and to the point. The woman was there in the deserted street and in that blinding snowstorm because she had nowhere else to go. She had been very ill, she said, and she might have spoken in the actual tense, as the pinched cheeks, the unnaturally bright eyes, ringed with bistrous circles, and the raucous, broken voice, all went to prove. I had no money about me, and even had I possessed any, of what immediate use could it have been? But I remembered that I had in a cupboard in my room part of a tin of corned beef, a fragment of a loaf, and a bottle of beer. I told her the condition of affairs, and after a moment's hesitation she decided to accompany me. I opened the door of the house with my latchkey, and she followed me into my room, treading so lightly, at my whispered

request, that I was scarcely conscious of her presence. I spread the simple viands before her, and she attacked them with the very rage of hunger. As I watched her, I heard the thunderous murmur of the landlord's voice below, and stepping quickly to the door locked it as quietly as I could. As I turned again towards my guest, I saw in her face a most horrible and abject fear, a fear which had swallowed up fatigue, hunger, and all other nameable sensations. A muffled, heavy tread came up the wooden stairs leading from the basement, and I could see the girl's heart beating with frantic terror as the steps approached—her body shaking with short, sharp vibrations. The door was tried, and of course resisted. "Who's in there with you?" asked the landlord's voice, and the stricken figure in the chair beside the table seemed to shrink in stature at the vibrant, menacing sound. I replied that I was alone. "You're a liar," the voice throbbed back to me. "You've got a woman with you. Open the door, or I'll break it in." The woman's aspect was abject beyond all language to describe, and I was not free of fear on my own account, for the huge man could have broken me like a biscuit. I made no answer, and with no more ado he set his shoulder to the panel. The flimsy lock broke at the pressure, and the landlord stalked into the room. His gaze fell upon the woman, and he stopped short. How long, as he stood and she sat, both still as figures of carven stone, their eyes dwelt on each other, his with their unchanging, damnatory scowl, hers with a world of terror and amazement and supplication in them,

I do not know. There are brief flashes of time which seem to fill eternity. Without a word, he raised his hand and waved her to the door. Without a word she rose and obeyed the gesture, passing him with bent head. He followed. I heard the quick flutter of her feet and his massive tread pass along the hall. The door opened and closed. The heavy tread returned alone, passed my room, and descended the stairs. And there the story ends. I left the house that morning, and have never since set foot in the street in which it stands.

In that part of the Strand, now demolished, upon which abuts the southern end of Kingsway, stood a little tavern known as the "Spotted Dog." At the back of the ground-floor was a small, ill-lit, ill-ventilated room, where, originally on Saturday afternoons and later on most evenings of the week, a little society of people, mostly journalists, used to come together to talk and smoke. The little band did not, at the moment, include anybody of especial importance, but a rather infrequent visitor there has since become a very great personage indeed. He was a slim-built, eager-looking, quick-eyed, handsome young fellow, who answered to the name of Alfred Harmsworth. My acquaintance with him was only of the slightest, and did not last long, but three-and-twenty years later, when he had become a multi-millionaire, a peer of the realm, and the proprietor of innumerable newspapers, and I was very glad to accept a berth as journalistic odd-job man on the *Daily Mirror*, we met again, and had

a long hour's talk over our common reminiscences. Having eaten his bread for nearly two years—for which, however, I hope I gave a fair and sufficient equivalent in work done—and being able to bear testimony—as I gladly do—that his marvellous success has left him as modest and frank a companion as I ever spent an hour's talk withal, it is with some reluctance that I enter on the expression of my views regarding him as what he verily is—one of the most potent living influences of the day. In his public capacity I believe him to be the incarnation of an evil already great, and one which threatens to develop into as serious a menace to the commonweal as has been seen in England since we kicked James the Second across the Straits of Dover. In exactly how many newspapers he holds a paramount interest I do not know. I have heard the number stated as high as fifty. That is very likely an exaggeration, but it is pretty certain that, if it be so, the exaggeration is merely prophetic. A man in the prime of life, gifted with his ambitious and acquisitive temperament and his business genius, and backed by the capital Lord Northcliffe is able to command, will very certainly not be content to rest and be thankful after the feats of conquest he has already performed. It is matter of common knowledge that he is the sole proprietor or the dominant power of several London daily and weekly journals, including the *Times*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Globe*, the *Evening News*, the *Observer*, the *Weekly Dispatch*, and the *World*, not to mention such (intellectually) negligible little sheets as *Answers*,

Home Chat, and the like; and that his mandate is law in the editorial offices of a large number of locally-important provincial papers. It will certainly be no great exaggeration to say that Lord Northcliffe can control the utterance of twenty journals of wide circulation, and consequently of considerable authority. When one says that it is of common knowledge that he wields so enormous a power, the statement must be understood as subject to a vast reservation. The common knowledge extends only to journalistic, political, and financial circles, which means that it is matter of common ignorance to at least ninety-five per cent. of the population in general. That means that any item of the great bulk of the British public might find repeated in a dozen or a score of apparently individual and independent newspapers identically the same opinion, differing only in its verbal expression, on any subject of vital importance which might be occupying the public attention at a given moment. If it be urged that the majority of people read only one newspaper—which is true—it may be pointed out in rejoinder—and this is equally true—that the great majority of that majority implicitly adopt the political and sociological views urged by the one journal they read. The number of people who think so or so regarding public questions because the *Times*, the *Telegraph*, or the *Standard* says so or so is enormous, and that one man should be able to convert a score of journals into a poly-megaphone for the blaring forth of his individual opinion over the entire face of England is a grave public danger. It is no less than a contradiction of the vital

principle on which the only possible utility of a public Press to the community can be based. I am not, and never could have been, an expert on the business side of journalism, and for a man who has passed so much of his life in and about newspaper offices, I am absurdly ignorant of recent journalistic developments. But such common-sense and such knowledge of commercial history as I possess are sufficient to convince me of the frightful peril to which the free expression of free thought in England is exposed by the success of Lord Northcliffe's line of campaign. I take it for granted that that success will have the inevitable result of all similar successes, that other men possessing a larger or smaller modicum of his genius and temperament will imitate his methods, that other corporations similar to that he controls will arise, that, after passing through a prefatory period of internecine warfare, they will combine for their common interest, and that in a very few years from now the entire Press of Great Britain will be merely the mouthpiece of a handful of colossal capitalists, who will dictate to the nation, with none to say them nay, on every conceivable subject, from the tremendous choice of peace or war with other Powers to the price of the morning egg and rasher. That such a corporation would wield its power in the interest of the nation, or in any interest but its own, is an inconceivability I shall waste no time in discussing, since I am not writing this book in order to insult the common-sense of my readers. When Henry Thomas Buckle said that the only possible means of preventing any man, or body of men, from

abusing power, was to prevent them from acquiring power, he uttered one of the few absolute and unshakeable verities regarding human nature that have ever been put on paper. I find myself here in the position of a doctor whose skill, sufficient to diagnose a malady, is incompetent to prescribe the remedy. But about my diagnosis I am absolutely certain. Another twenty years of uncontrolled exploitation of the Press on the lines followed by Lord Northcliffe will deliver the British Empire hand and foot, body and soul, to the tender mercies of a journalistic Trust, will make our Sovereign its powerless pensioner, our Lords and Commons the registrars of its *ipse dixit*, and our proletariat a flock of sheep to be fleeced and flayed at its sweet will.

(I am not writing this book on any fixed plan. Reminiscences and reflections will fall upon the page pretty much in the order in which they occur to me, with no necessary relation to each other in the matter of chronological arrangement, an adjustment which will, I believe, give them a characteristic value higher than that to be attained by presenting them in a less arbitrary order. As Anthony Hamilton says in his "Mémoires de Grammont," it is of little importance with what feature of a face a painter may begin if only the portrait, when completed, is a recognisable likeness of the subject who sat for it. Such a method as I propose, carried out in relation to a career so broken as my own, may even not be without its biographical value.)

During most part of the four or five years from

which the foregoing reminiscences are culled, my staple income had been derived from the *Sporting Life*, on the staff of which journal I had been enrolled as dramatic critic through the introduction of my old friend, Byron Webber, now retired from the bustle of active journalistic life. He belonged to a school of publicists now rapidly vanishing. He was an all-round man, who touched life at many points, and so fully that it was something of a wonder how he had managed to acquire so much information of so many and so divergent kinds. His knowledge of English literature was both wide and deep, he was an excellent critic of painting and sculpture, a really learned virtuoso in furniture, china, and domestic art generally, an encyclopædia of first-hand information regarding pretty nearly every form of sport, and a living history of the English theatre for many years past.

The first year of my time as a dramatic critic was signalised by the phenomenon remembered in theatrical circles as "the Matinée Rush." A quite wonderful number of amateur playwrights produced pieces at afternoon shows, given mainly at the theatres in the Strand, and especially at the Gaiety. I remember one week in especial, during which I witnessed more or less of seventeen different performances. Of all the pieces so produced I recollect only one which found its way into the regular evening bill, a really funny farce by the late Joseph Derrick, entitled *Confusion*, but the London stage was enriched to the extent of one actor and one actress of genuine value. Alice Lingard appeared one afternoon at the Gaiety in

"Adrienne Lecouvreur." The day was stiflingly hot, and the curtain rose before a mere scattered handful of spectators. When it rose a second time the audience had markedly increased in number, and at its final fall the house was very fairly full. People had gone out in the intervals and brought in other people, and the result was that, a month or two later, Miss Lingard appeared at the Globe in the leading female part of Sidney Grundy's brilliant comedy *The Glass of Fashion*, under the management of Messrs. Hollingshead and Shine, and thereafter until her death maintained a prominent place among London actresses. The actor who was made by the Matinée Rush was Mr. Beerbohm Tree, whom I seem to remember as having played in all the afternoon shows of the time—a physical impossibility. But at that time Mr. Tree, like Ariel, seemed "to divide, and burn in many places." How he managed even to acquire the words of so many parts, to say nothing of investing each part he played—most of them poor, trashy, amateur attempts at characterisation—with some semblance of life and individuality, was in its way something of a miracle. He, too, was given his first real metropolitan chance in *The Glass of Fashion*, and Prince Perowski was the first item of that long gallery of masterly character studies on which his fame reposes.

The life of a dramatic critic, when once the novelty of the business has worn off, entails a good deal of rather disgustful drudgery, but I remember my experience in that capacity with pleasure as a whole. It is a purple patch in the fabric of one's

artistic life to have seen Salvini, incomparably the greatest histrionic artist of his day, with whose retirement from the stage Tragedy died out of the European theatre. No other living actor will ever tempt me from my fireside to see him in certain pieces in which I saw Salvini — *Othello*, *King Lear*, *La Morte Civile*, or *The Gladiator*. In the gifts of fire and animation, the Mounet-Sully of twenty years ago and the Lewis Waller of the present day may be said occasionally, in their most inspired moments, to have approached him, but the Titanic massiveness and grandeur of his general style, the literally frightful, paroxysmal quality of his moments of anger or despair, were as far beyond emulation as they are beyond description. He was the only actor I have ever seen who had, for long moments together, the power to abolish the footlights, to inspire me to actual forgetfulness of my physical surroundings, with the sentiment of the scene he played, and that in spite of the fact that I am but very indifferently acquainted with the language in which he acted. Language ceased to matter when Salvini crossed the stage. Soul spoke to soul, unimpeded by any such petty, accidental barrier.

It is time, my reader may perhaps begin to think, that I came to Hecuba, and entered upon the history of my professional misfortunes, about which I made so big a brag in the opening paragraph of this book. My merely literary woes began when I was four-and-twenty. I was living in the village of Rochefort, in the Belgian Ardenne,

with my brother Christie, acting as his amanuensis. A month or two earlier, in London, I had begun a novel, and I continued to work at it in the intervals of writing at Christie's dictation. It was entitled "Fooled by Fate," and it contained certain incidents which, with my consent, were afterwards embedded in my brother's novel, "Cynic Fortune." When I had finished it, I sent it—unregistered, which was foolish—to an English firm with a big connection in the story-syndicating line of business. When a month had elapsed without a word of acknowledgment from the firm in question I wrote a shy little note asking when I might hope to know their verdict. I received a prompt reply to the effect that no such volume had reached them. And that was the last I ever heard of it. I do not, looking back on what I can remember of the book, think that the intellectual wealth of the world was much diminished by the loss of "Fooled by Fate." But it had cost me some six months of hard and conscientious labour, the silly dreams of fame and fortune I had known while writing it had been very sweet to me, and their brusque evanishment left my life a little bleak and colourless for a time.

For quite a while after this misadventure, things went well with me. I wrote a second novel, "Monkey Mephisto," which was published by Messrs. Dicks as a Christmas Number, and it brought me my first and only commission, which I fulfilled by writing "A Game of Bluff," published in serial in the *Penny Illustrated Paper*, and subsequently in book form by Messrs. Chatto & Windus.

I got fair prices and even some small kudos for these books, and began to think myself on my way to become some day something of a personage. Wherein I was as one deceived, and the truth was not in me.

I began to take myself seriously—always a ludicrous mistake for any writer who is less than a man of indubitable genius. I had always had a high and grave appreciation of the literary craft, and had never regarded my first books as anything more than educational exercises in the great art I tremulously hoped one day to practise worthily. While I was writing the last chapters of "A Game of Bluff," I conceived the idea of a story I at first entitled "A Page of Life," afterwards—long afterwards—given to the world as "A Song of Sixpence." Elderly people who write, or who have written, will need no stale and tedious reminder of the sensations, so intense, so bewildering, so inspiring, so terrifying, which accompany the gestation of their first GREAT BOOK. I sometimes wonder if the first perception of the quickening of the actual flesh-and-blood baby in the mother's womb can be a more wonderful experience.

Christie and I had wandered to Paris. It was the winter of 1886—the severest winter, I have heard many people say, since that of L'Année Terrible. Christie—as was frequently the case with him—was behindhand with his work, and we were slaving double tides to make up for lost time. He composed with marvellous rapidity and fluency, and for some weeks I set on paper to his dictation a daily average of five thousand words. That, in itself,

would have been no bad day's work, but when it was done, and Christie was recreating himself at the café or the theatre, I was sitting in my room, grinding out, with a slow laboriousness in pathetic contrast with his dexterous rapidity, the pages of "A Song of Sixpence." By what strange process of cerebration such a feat was feasible I cannot say, but I know that, while my fingers were often taxed to keep pace with my brother's fluent tongue, and while one half my brain was keenly watching and admiring what my fingers wrote, the other half was elaborating touches of character and turns of phrase to be duly set down in my solitary labour later on. I know that, when, night after night I stumbled, drunk with fatigue, into bed, the two sets of imaginary people and the widely divergent worlds in which they moved got themselves mixed up in an imbecile and exasperating jumble which made sleep a sort of ludicrous terror. I know that night after night I left that unrestful slumber, to sit in night-shirt and dressing-gown, with a foot of snow on the window-sill outside, and to beat and blow my chilled blue fingers to some faint consciousness of the pen between them. I claim so much credit in connection with that miserable book, doomed to cost me months of hope deferred and bitter disappointment, that it was written with a level passion of resolute endeavour to touch the high-water mark of all that I was then capable of in human knowledge and human sympathy and in artistry of achievement. And I would willingly go through all, and more than, the pain it was destined to cause me, to hear hearty, kindly George Sims say of

another book, as he said of "A Song of Sixpence," that it was "the best bit of work he had read for years;" to listen to the words of praise it drew from great-hearted Robert Buchanan, the best and dearest friend I ever had; or to read, written by the hand which had given the world "Richard Feverel" and "Beauchamp's Career," that "in George Murdoch I had created one of the few living, breathing men in modern fiction."

For it did get published at last, three years and nine months after, in a white-walled villa perched on the heights of Montboron, with the salt smell of the Mediterranean piercing the heavy odours of rose and eucalyptus, and the lights of the Promenade des Anglais twinkling along the Baie des Anges—a wonderful change from sleet-riddled Paris—I laid down my pen beside the final page of the manuscript. I have never had any satisfactory assurance that the sexual morality of England has shown any marked decline since it appeared, but no fewer than six-and-thirty publishers, moved by patriotic dread of that result, refused to father it. Six-and-thirty robust, well-nourished men shook and paled over that poor little bundle of manuscript. One of them read it three times and three times recoiled from the dread responsibility. "Why?" I asked in ever-growing wonder, and I ask it still. One of the primmest old ladies I ever knew, a very dragon of all the proprieties, said to me regarding it, in her quaint, quavering old voice, "I'm afraid you are not a good man, Mr. Murray, but you have written a very good book." I have had letters from people whose faces I never

saw, thanking me for having written "A Song of Sixpence." I have never heard an unfriendly word about it from man or woman. It was published nineteen years ago, and it is selling still, and I got ten pounds for it, and shall never see another penny. I was glad enough to get that, or anything at all, for it, and had offered it to half a score of publishers as a free gift.

A circumstance which, perhaps, partially explained this cold reception of my literary bantling was that, about this time, a clique of sexless simpletons known as the National Vigilance Committee had prosecuted Mr. Henry Vizitelly for publishing much-Bowdlerised versions of some of Zola's "Rougon-Macquart" series, and had succeeded in sending the veteran publisher and publicist to prison for twelve months. Still, novels much more questionable, both in incident and phraseology, than "A Song of Sixpence" were appearing with the imprimatur of London houses. When Chatto & Windus at last made up their minds to publish my book, they insisted on one excision. I had spoken of "those members of the Sorrowful Sisterhood who haunt the purlieus of the midnight Haymarket." That not very rampant indecency was ruthlessly suppressed, and from that fact the reader who does not know "A Song of Sixpence" may get a fair idea of its verbal chastity or coarseness. I had, in fact, written the book with what I thought—and think—an excess of reticence. And, while it was still passing from hand to hand, a firm which had shudderingly declined to publish it brought out another novel, from which I cull one

phrase, with sincere apologies for inflicting on my readers anything so nasty. It describes the *odours* of the ladies present at a ball, ending up with "the stench, deep as the pedal-notes of an organ, exhaled by the armpits of a corpulent dowager." As I am a living man, the firm which declined to publish *me*, published *that!* I do not, and I will not, believe that any circumstance at once so galling, so futile, and so ludicrous, has ever happened to any other man who has ever held a pen. I remember telling James Whistler about it, and I shall never forget his shriek of eldritch laughter nor the characteristic comment which followed. "By gad, sir, such a fool as that's wasted as a publisher. He ought to have been an art critic. What!"

Apropos of Whistler, let me set down here a droll incident in which the great little artist was concerned. Sitting one morning at breakfast in Paris, I read in the *Figaro* that the Luxembourg Gallery had acquired Whistler's famous "Portrait of his Mother." I determined to see it, and to utilise the luncheon hour for the purpose. Having no time to lose in wandering about the Gallery looking for the picture, I applied to one of the attendants. "Vous avez ici," I said, "un tableau récemment acquis, le Portrait de sa Mère, par le peintre americain, M. Whistler." Much to my surprise, the functionary made me a low bow, and with every sign of the most respectful solicitude, begged me to do him the honour of accompanying him. He took me to the portrait, expressed a hope that I approved of the light and the place in which it was hung, and of the company in which it found

itself upon the wall. Then I understood. The man had noted my foreign-sounding French, and had jumped to the conclusion that I was "le peintre americain" in person. I said nothing to indurate that impression, but nothing to correct it, and on leaving the place gave him a five-franc piece. A little later I met Whistler in the Rue de Rivoli, and told him of the adventure. "Oh! Eh? What? *You* are the confounded fellow, eh? Why, by gad, sir, when I went to the Gallery yesterday, they wouldn't believe I had painted my own picture!"

To return to my subject. I have suffered a good deal at the hands of publishers, but I bear so little malice that I will make them a present of a bit of wisdom, at which, had I never been spurred on to think on certain subjects by their dealings with me, I might never have arrived. *À quelque-chose malheur est bon.* It is a sad fact that, as a class, they are more ignorant of their business than any other set of men I know or know of. They are the helpless slaves of a little set of superstitions and a little set of phrases. One of the most cherished of their superstitions, and the most fundamentally foolish of them all, is that there is in actual, objective existence a certain body which they call "the public." There is, as a matter of fact, no such body. There is, in its place, a quite innumerable lot of little bodies—the publics. There are, for instance, Mr. George Meredith's public and Miss Marie Corelli's public. There are Mr. J. M. Barrie's public and Mr. Jerome K. Jerome's public. There is a public which likes to laugh and a public

that likes to cry, a public that welcomes thought and a public which shuns thought as the universal enemy shuns holy water. There is an already great, and rapidly growing public, which is quite emancipated from old-womanish terror of the new or the unusual in ethics and social philosophy, a public which is inclined rather to welcome original absurdities in those directions, if they are only cleverly expressed, than to turn from any serious experiment in morals or idea. There is—and perhaps always will be—a vast public which still thinks it wise to tell their children that they were found in wells and parsley beds, the sort of people for whose behoof, a few years ago, an edition of "David Copperfield," minus the episode of Steerforth and Little Em'ly, expunged as "unfit for publication," was issued. There are points at which some of these different publics overlap, like the scales of a fish, but they are as absolutely distinct one from another, and, as bodies, they have no more inter-relation than the lovers of Wagner and Berlioz have with the admirers of the gentlemen who composed "Woa, Emma!" or "Two Lovely Black Eyes." Every writer of talent has his public ready made, waiting and eager for him, whether he deals in tears or laughter, in thought or in horse-play, in idealism or in pickle-herring farce. To say to any author regarding any book, as was said to me by six-and-thirty different publishers regarding "A Song of Sixpence," "It's very clever, but the public does not want it," is to give utterance to as flat and foolish a contradiction in terms as was ever spoken by the lips of man.

I have sometimes wondered whether the institution of a British Academy of Letters, for which Matthew Arnold pleaded so insistently, might not find its strongest justification in a direction regarding which Arnold found nothing to say. It might be within the power of such a body to render practically impossible such stupid outrages on liberty and thought as, for instance, the prosecution of Mr. Vizitelly, to which I have already alluded, and, by a timely protest, or even by its mere silence and inaction, rescue the publisher and the public from the fussy and incalculable action of cliques of well-intentioned but uncultured busybodies. It is simply because organised and drilled stupidity is stronger than scattered and leaderless intelligence that such corporations as the National Vigilance Society, which do not count in their membership one name respectable in Letters or in Art, are able spasmodically to impose their Sunday-school morality on the nation, and—incidentally—to make England the laughing-stock of Europe. An ordinary police magistrate, however admirably he may discharge the general run of his duties—and the stipendiary magistrates of London are as valuable a set of public servants as is possessed by any city in the world—certainly does not form the ideal tribunal for the decision of what is or is not expedient in either Art or Literature. This contention was proved to my mind pretty conclusively by the late Mr. Vaughan, of Bow Street (who sat in judgment on the Zola-Vizitelly business), in regard to Mr. Rudolf Blind's picture, "The World's Desire," prosecuted by one or other of our irresponsible Bumble-cum-Podsnap

societies for the Propagation of Prurient Prudery. Mr. Blind was astute enough to call a body of expert witnesses, among whom figured the late Ford Madox Brown and Sir Alma Tadema, in his defence. Mr. Vaughan, in his summing up, said that, in his opinion, the picture stood condemned as immoral and indecent, but he did not see his way to impose that opinion against the contradictory view expressed by such authorities as the witnesses for the defence. It was the utterance of an honest man, but it reduced to absurdity the position in which Mr. Vaughan was placed by the law. It was a case for the decision of the Royal Academy, but that institution, having no legal status in the matter, uttered no word. The Academy had been silent also—to its indelible disgrace—in a much graver affair which had happened a year or two earlier. M. Garnier, a French artist of distinguished talent, had painted a gallery of over a hundred pictures illustrative of episodes from the adventures of the immortal Pantagruel, perhaps the most remarkable monument ever raised by the genius of a painter to the genius of a writer. The paintings, after attracting vast crowds in Paris, were transferred to London. Some dozen of them were selected as a *casus belli* between the National Vigilance Society and the exhibitors; the day went against the latter, the pictures were ordered to be destoyed, and were only saved from that fate by an indignant remonstrance, delivered through the French Ambassador, from the Ministry of Fine Arts in Paris. England is surely the only country in Europe in which so ignobly stupid an affair would have been possible.

The national muddle-headedness regarding the question of morality in Art, and the culpable supineness of the men whose bounden duty it is to make Art respected—the men who have succeeded greatly in its practice—were illustrated with a quite curious completeness by the selection of the present Licensor of Plays, Mr. George Alexander Redford. At the time of his appointment I wrote to the *Westminster Gazette* a brief note, asking why, out of the forty odd million nobodies who compose the population of the British Islands, this especial person should have been chosen for such a post. The *Westminster Gazette* printed my query, but it passed unanswered—as I suppose, because it was unanswerable. Mr. Redford had, I am informed, spent a blameless youth in the occupation of passing sovereigns over a bank-counter in a copper shovel—an unquestionably benevolent but not conspicuously intellectual employment, and no more obviously "moral" than, for example, weighing cheese or cutting out trousers. Why such a person should have been installed as guardian of the dramatic proprieties is certainly something of a nut to crack. The introduction of Mr. Robert Harcourt's Theatres Bill, which proposes to transfer Mr. Redford's powers to the County Council, gives warrant for a hope that his official line may not stretch quite so far as Banquo's progeny, but I cannot say that that hope greatly comforts me. Legend tells us of a certain "old woman of Syracuse," who fervently prayed for the continued life of the Emperor Nero "lest the devil should reign after him." I feel myself rather in the position of that apocryphal old lady. I am strongly

inclined to doubt whether the County Council will much better Mr. Redford's instruction in the post he occupies. I have never been able to see any possible use at all in such a post. I have never been able to understand why the freedom accorded for generations past to the man who puts his ideas into the form of a book or speaks them from the pulpit or the platform should be denied to him who prefers to express them in dialogue intended to be delivered from the stage. To me, it is as marvellous as it is disgusting—I can find no milder word—that men of the intellectual status of those who provide our drama should submit to so degrading a tutelage, whatever may be the form it takes. Such a tutelage is an insult to every man and every woman who writes in English matter intended for publication; it is an especial insult to every man and every woman who treads the stage; and they stamp the insult indelibly on their own foreheads so long as they fail in their plain human duty to resent it.

It is not possible to compute how much England loses by the nullification of native talent and in the consideration of other cultured nations by this stupid cowardice on the part of her leading artists and literati. Let me here offer to anybody who cares to avail himself of it an easy opportunity for a bit of cheap sarcasm by recounting another of my own experiences. Six years ago I compiled a volume I entitled "The Pessimist's Birthday Book," to which I wrote a preface in the form of an essay on "The Necessity of Pessimism." The philosophy of the essay can be summed up in two sentences I proposed to print upon the title-page. The first is

from the pen of M. Museux, and runs as follows : *Le Pessimisme progressiste, celui qui ne se contente pas de déplorer le mal, mais poursuit l'amélioration morale et sociale de ce qui est, voilà la philosophie fortifiante dont nous avons besoin en cette époque troublée.* The second sentence is the work of the Rev. Mr. G. M. Kaufman : "It is a sensible remark of Malon's that our wisdom consists perhaps in thinking *en Pessimiste*, for the nature of things is cruel and bad, and to act *en Optimiste*, for human intervention is efficacious for moral and social improvement." In the course of the essay, I found it necessary to express my views regarding supernatural religion in general and Christianity in particular, and I compared the last-named faith, greatly to its disadvantage, with Buddhism. After vainly offering the book to several publishers I induced a distinguished friend to forward the preface to the editor of a leading Review, who returned it to him with expressions of deep regret that he was unable to use it on account of the strength of its attack upon Christianity. Of the work, regarded merely as literature, he spoke in the most cordial terms. Now, I am not so unreasonable as to feel any ill-will against the editor in question. In common fairness I have to recognise the extremely ungrateful position in which he found himself. As a man of intelligence, with the intellectual prestige of his Review at heart, he naturally wanted to publish a piece of work of which he could speak in such terms. But as a man of business in a position of business trust it is his plain duty to consider the feelings of the shareholders he represents, and in a

battle between such interests it needs no prophet to tell us which interest must win. But the question will intrude itself—how often will a thoughtful man so placed find himself in the course of any given twelve months in a precisely similar position, and how many thoughtful utterances regarding grave problems will he be forced to reject because of the pusillanimity of the power behind the editorial chair? And the further question follows inevitably—how can a country in which discussion of social and religious questions is so hampered hope intellectually to compete with countries in which, as in France and Germany, it is inconceivable that any cleanly written expression of sane opinion on any nameable topic could be so boycotted? I say deliberately that Englishmen of intelligence can find no task more worthy or more cryingly demanding their attention than to devise some means by which the brains of England can be emancipated from the intolerable bondage of the stupidest and least-cultured section of the English public.

The hotel in which I invariably put up in Paris was a comfortable little hostelry situated between the Rue de Provence and the Place de l'Opéra. It was kept by an old gentleman whom I will call M. Paulet, who was a good deal of a character. He was a remarkably handsome old man, and one of those people of whom Charles Lamb says that cleanliness seems in them something more than a mere absence of its opposite. He had the clean, pink-and-white complexion of a healthy baby, and a rich mass of pure white hair, which, like his

moustache and the obsolete long whiskers he affected, shone like delicate filaments of frosted silver wire. On one occasion I accompanied him on a visit to the country. He was got up for the occasion in a suit of white duck, with a white linen hat and white shoes, and he sparkled so that it positively hurt one's eyes to look at him. We went to visit an old friend of his, a M. Mauri, who had the reputation of being the best laugher in France. Fortune favoured him—and us—with an opportunity for him to exhibit his powers in that direction. M. Paulet was by way of being a naturalist, and, like Ingoldsby's Sir Thomas, he went footling about a weed-covered duck-pond in search of specimens, and fell in. He emerged a ludicrous object, with his hat, his long Dundreary whiskers, his handsome Roman nose, and every angle of the erst-spotless white ducks dripping strings of green slime. We set out for the house, and, turning a bend in the road, met M. Mauri face to face. The latter dropped on to a bank by the roadside as if he had been shot, and laughed, as Carlyle says concerning a similar performance of Herr Teufelsdröch, "like the neighing of all Tattersall's." He howled and yelled and screamed and bellowed and snorted, spouting laughter as a whale spouts water. M. Paulet stood calmly smiling till he had laughed himself to quiet, and then said, with a beautiful wave of the weed-bedraggled white hat, "Mauri, tu ris? Te salutant!"—which I thought as good a joke as could have been expected in the circumstances.

Paulet had, in early life, been a friend of Henri

Murger, and he and the great poet-historiographer of Bohemia had once played the audacious trick of running together an unlicensed café, a freak which had cost them some months of exile, until the offended authorities could be "squared" by friends in high places. Another friend of his, and a one-time inmate of his hotel, was M. Belmontet, now long since forgotten, but at one time the laughing-stock of literary Europe in his self-imposed style of "le poète de l'Empire." M. Paulet promised me an introduction to this gentleman—a promise which, to my real regret, was never fulfilled. He seems to have been a quite mild and blameless person, whose brain had been turned—like that of many an abler man—by the success of Napoleon the Third's murderous *coup d'état*. He expressed his admiration of his idol in what were probably the most execrable verses ever penned by mortal man, which he printed and sedulously distributed at his proper cost. The rumour that the Emperor had paid him a handsome yearly pension out of his private pocket on condition that he ceased those proceedings may have been merely a calumny, but may also conceivably have been the statement of a fact. To be cursed by Victor Hugo was bad, no doubt; but to be blessed by Belmontet must have been even more painful to a man who, poor creature as he was in most respects, possessed real literary discrimination. Of the hundreds of lines of incredible balderdash of Belmontet's composition which M. Paulet repeated to me at odd times I remember only three. Two form the peroration of an Ode to the Emperor on the occasion of the opening of the Halles Centrales—"Le

Ventre de Paris," as Zola called them—and ran thus—

> "Ô peuple de Paris, que belles sont tes Halles!
> Béni soit l'Empereur qui nous les fit Centrales!"

The third was, according to M. Paulet, the verse which won for its author the Imperial pension. It was the closing line of a poem inspired by the public rejoicings occasioned by the cessation of the Crimean War—

> "Le vrai feu d'artifice est d'être magnanime!"

I asked what was supposed to have been the amount of the pension which had induced the Poet of the Empire to desert his Muse. "On dit," said M. Paulet, with perfect gravity, "que c'était un million par an. Mais, mon ami, si j'avais été capable d'embêter Badinguet avec des vers comme ça, ce n'est pas une telle mesquinerie qui m'aurait cloué le bec."

In Paulet the French stage had lost a comedian of exceptional power. He was a fun-maker of a curious type, and nothing but his really captivating personality and the genuine kindness of heart which no eccentricity could long obscure could have saved him from frequent assault and battery. On the first occasion on which I dined at his table he gave a specimen of his peculiar cast of humour. There was a staid, portly, prosperous-looking provincial gentleman present, whom I afterwards learned to be an *avoué* in good practice in a country town. M. Paulet offered him a dish of mushrooms, which he politely refused, saying that

he did not like them. Paulet's face flushed red, and his steel-blue eyes flashed unspeakable wrath and contempt. "You do not like them!" he thundered, in a voice like the clangour of a brazen gong. "No! the simple fruits of the patient earth, of the generous mother of us all, are not for such as you, whose senses are depraved and whose souls are spotted by such debaucheries as Nero and Commodus would have blushed to perpetrate! Ah! but I recognise you well, unworthy son of a desolate motherland, too-worthy representative of the generation whose nameless and unheard-of vices brought upon our once great and glorious France the ruinous disasters of the year '70!" This, and a good deal more in the same Ercles' vein, he poured out upon the amazed and indignant provincial, and he ended up his denunciation by a truly frightful prophetic picture of the poor gentleman's death upon the guillotine, with a vivid touch about the devil standing by to catch his soul at the moment it jumped out of his neck. Then, with an absolute change of manner, he said, addressing the rest of his astonished auditory, "I ought to say that this is the first time I have ever had the honour of beholding this gentleman, who makes me the effect of a most honest citizen and worthy person. *À votre santé*, Monsieur." Madame Paulet, who was a woman of business, and did not approve of this fashion of addressing solvent and respectable clients, was fluent in apologies to the stranger and in angry objurgations of her husband's folly and rudeness. "Go, excellent but stupid female," replied Paulet, with placid dignity. "Monsieur and I are Great

Souls, floating in an ether thou couldst not breathe, and we comprehend one another. Go, thou, boil thy pot, cherish thy children, and thank God for thy husband." And that same night the worthy provincial, whom I came to know well, and who turned out to be a very good fellow indeed, took M. and Madame Paulet to the theatre, and to an excellent supper afterwards.

In common with every other assortment of human beings I have ever intimately known, the society of M. Paulet's hotel was full of interest. There was a poor fellow who lived in the garret, and who, I fear, would not have lived even there long had M. Paulet been a less patient and kindly host. He called himself a journalist, and was one of the thousand *ratés* of the artistic life who swarm in every great city. He wrote verse and fiction indomitably, but had never succeeded in getting any of his productions published, and the few francs a week he managed to scrape together came mainly from a small provincial journal for which he concocted a hash of Parisian small-talk culled from the columns of metropolitan newspapers. Shabby and half-starved and fireless, it was his lot to describe banquets at which he could never hope to sit, and fêtes and premières and flower-shows, an invitation to any one of which would probably have killed him with sheer amazement. To this poor fellow a curious little incident occurred. He was employed to make a fair copy of a mass of documents which had to be delivered at the Palais de Justice absolutely without fail at a certain hour on a certain morning. He toiled away at his task for a couple

of days on end, and then, feeling that he must either sleep or go mad, calculated how much—or rather, how little—repose he could afford to allow himself, and gave a few ill-spared coppers to Célestin, the boots of the hotel, to wake him at a given moment. Célestin forgot the commission, and the poor devil slept the sleep of complete exhaustion until he awoke within an hour of the time at which the delivery of the documents was due. With tears and sobs of despair he reproached the careless youth, but, his eye falling on the table on which lay his work, he saw that it was finished. He had completed it in his sleep.

Among the guests was one to whom I took a strong liking, an old Spanish gentleman, whose manner was beyond description winning and courtly. He had amassed a moderate competence in trade, and made no sort of pretence to be anything but what he was, but no grandee of his nation could have excelled the exquisite polish of his urbanity. He was universally liked, but all the same was regarded by most of his fellow-guests as something of a bore, inasmuch as almost his only conversational topic was his son, who had succeeded him in his former business as a fruit merchant at Lima. Bets used to be made as to how long he would remain in the salle-à-manger or the salon without making mention of this son, as to how often he would mention him in a given time, and so on. The son fell ill. I do not know the cost of telegraphing from Lima to Paris, but during the week or so after the old gentleman first knew of his son's indisposition a little fortune must have been spent

on the bulletins which rained upon him from South America. He had just taken his seat at table one midday when one arrived. He made his accustomed little bend of apology to Madame Paulet, opened the missive, and fell an inert mass beside his chair. He was raised and carried to his bed, from which he never rose again. He was dead within a week. The telegram consisted of the four crude words, "*Votre fils est mort.*" M. Paulet read it out to the company, and curses loud and deep were showered upon the brutal blockhead who had despatched it. The incident was the occasion of an interesting little display of a certain type of French character. C——, a basso singer, who shortly after appeared with great success at Covent Garden, a genuine typical Provençal, who seemed to have stepped out of the covers of one of Ernest Daudet's novels, was so affected that he sat undisguisedly weeping like a child. A fellow meridional, a jovial, noisy humorist, who was an *avocat*, burst into the room, full of a funny incident which had happened that morning in one of the Law Courts, and in another minute C——, the tears yet glistening in his big black beard like dew upon a bramble bush, was shaking the roof and making the glasses ring with peal on peal of delighted laughter.

It was immediately after the sale of my novel, "A Game of Bluff," that a series of events happened which, as much as anything that has ever occurred to me, illustrated the arbitrary and incalculable character of my luck. Christie and I

established ourselves for a week or two at a certain popular resort on the coast of Normandy, in an hotel conducted by a plump, personable, kindly old French lady, Madame Bruix. Among our fellow-guests was a handsome young English girl, apparently about nineteen years of age. She interested me by more than one circumstance. She was quite alone, she never either received or wrote a letter, and every morning immediately after breakfast she disappeared for the entire day until the dinner-hour. The landlady was a good deal of a gossip, and one day, with no invitation at all on my part, entered on a *resumé* of what she knew concerning her whom she called my "belle petite compatriote," to whom I shall henceforth refer as Miss Lucy March. Her history up to date had been unfortunate. She was the daughter of a once-flourishing professional man who had hopelessly ruined his career in a fashion not necessary to rehearse here, and of a lady then in an asylum, whose mental derangement had been precipitated, if not wholly caused, by her husband's ill-treatment of her, followed by his public disgrace. Miss March had been born into the Anglican communion, but had 'verted to Rome. Her father had fled into hiding, nobody knew whither, and she was absolutely alone in the world, with a fast-melting capital of some few score pounds between herself and complete destitution. A friend had given her an introduction to the Mother-Superior of a convent in the neighbourhood, and it was there she passed the major part of each day, studying conventual life with the object of discovering

whether she felt the vocation, and would be justified in joining the Sisterhood.

Miss March and I became acquainted, and I fell into the habit of conducting her to and from the convent gate, and so, quite easily, to sharing her evening walks on the sea-shore. I was a few years her senior, and in the absence of any other possible confidant it was natural enough that she should sooner or later appeal for such sympathy and advice as I could give. I heard anew the details I had learned from Madame Bruix, and Miss March further confided to me the confession that every hour she passed in the convent revealed to her more clearly her utter unfitness for its discipline. She was almost at the end of her slender resources, she was painfully conscious of her unpreparedness to battle with the world, the future was growing every moment more and more terrible to contemplate—what could she do ?

She was, as I have said, a handsome girl, of a rather striking and unusual type of dark beauty. She had a conspicuous gracefulness of movement and gesture, and a pleasing voice. I suggested the stage as a possible avenue to independent bread and cheese, and offered her an introduction to my friend Henry Herman, who was just on the point of leasing the Opéra Comique for the production of an extravaganza. Miss March closed gladly with the proposal, and a day or two later returned to London furnished with the promised introduction. Herman, one of the kindest of men, engaged her as a member of the chorus, and, although at that moment by no means too well off, paid her double

the usual salary. She wrote me a letter of thanks for my assistance, and Christie and myself shortly after migrating to Nice, for awhile I lost sight of her. Passing, a few months later, through the Norman watering-place, I heard of her again. Herman's extravaganza had failed to attract, but Herman, with his usual good-hearted loyalty, had found her another engagement elsewhere. Then she had fallen ill—so ill that she had received the viaticum, and had escaped death almost by a miracle. Business took me to London, and being there I called upon her. She had fallen into kind hands, and had almost completely recovered from her illness, but she was pathetically helpless and solitary. I had just sold my novel, "A Game of Bluff," my pocket was full of money and my heart full of hope, and the idea occurred to me—why not marry her? I was no more in love with her than I had—and have—been with a hundred other pretty women, which, as things were destined to fall out, was fortunate for me, but I returned to Nice a fortnight later an engaged man, with the understanding that Lucy was to join me there directly the purchase of her trousseau was completed. Meanwhile the priest of the church she attended in London undertook to procure for her from the then Cardinal-Archbishop of Westminster—the great and noble Henry Edward Manning—the necessary dispensation enabling her to marry one outside the pale of the Catholic Church.

The peculiar strangeness of the adventure began almost from the moment of her arrival at Nice. I met her at the station, took her to a

neighbouring restaurant for luncheon, and, having seen her luggage mounted on a four-wheeled cab, gave the driver the address—that of the Couvent du Cœur de Marie, on Montboron, to whose Superior Lucy bore an introduction from the Mother of a similar establishment in London. I remembered afterwards an undefinable air of humorous surprise on the face of our charioteer as he heard the direction, but at the moment thought nothing of it. The cab mounted the hill, and stopped after a journey of considerable length in front of a heap of charred and smoking ruins. I called to the driver to go on, to which he replied, "Mais nous sommes arrivés, m'sieu. Voici le Couvent du Cœur de Marie"! The convent had been burned to the ground the night before, and I now understood the cryptic amusement with which the jarvey had received my instructions. For the moment I was nonplussed. Then I asked the practical humorist if there was any other similar establishment in the neighbourhood. He replied, with Voltairean irreverence, that the mountain was *pouilleuse* with *des boîtes de cette espèce.* I bade him drive to the nearest. He did so. My ring at the bell was answered by a black-garmented old recluse to whom I presented my card, begging her to transmit it to her Superior and to say that a young English lady in distressful circumstances had need of her counsel. After a brief absence the old nun returned, and conducted us through a beautifully kept garden, along a bleak stone hall, up a flight of bare stone steps, and into a stone-blind apartment, the door of which closed behind us with

a most ghostly and ominous click. Lucy by this time was in a sort of suppressed hysterical condition. Groping about in the black darkness I broke my shin on the edge of a chair, in which I placed her, administering such comfort as I could. The house was obviously a very old one, dating, I should fancy, from about the reign of Louis XIV. Perhaps it had not always been a retreat for holy women, but I could not help wondering how many years might have passed since the chill darkness of that stony cell had echoed with a lover's kiss. Something of the same sentiment was obviously in Lucy's mind also, for she gently repulsed me, murmuring in a rather stricken voice, "Please! Please! not here!" I made out that the apartment was cut into two by a grille of strong iron bars. Having broken my other shin on a second chair, I sat upon it as the door opened in the further side of the room, admitting a faint grey ray of light. I heard a flutter of skirts, and then a voice—the most marvellously beautiful sound I have ever heard issue from human lips. Its effect in the circumstances was indescribable—magical. It was as though the angel Israfel, "who hath the sweetest voice of all God's creatures," was speaking out of the thick darkness. I told this invisible seraph the condition of affairs, and the marvellous voice rang back in womanly pity of Mademoiselle's unfortunate plight. Emboldened by this, I ventured to ask if Madame la Supérieure could receive Mademoiselle into her house, at least for the moment, until some permanent shelter could be found for her. Madame la Supérieure was desolate, but the house, normally

full, was now inconveniently crowded by the presence under its roof of certain of the luckless ladies whose asylum had been burned the night before. Would Madame then have the extreme kindness to suggest anything to be done in the circumstances? Yes. Let me conduct Mademoiselle to the Hôtel des Trois Couronnes, Bouvelard Masséna, and say that she was sent thither by her recommendation. The house was of a perfect respectability, much frequented by the clergy, and Mademoiselle would receive every care and attention and be as secure as under the wings of angels. And so, with the darkness ringing as from a chime of fairy bells with a sweet-toned benediction and a reminder to Lucy that she must make of her husband "un bon Catholique," we went out into the light of day.

I took Lucy to the hotel so recommended, and she being tired-out by her long journey from London, left her for the night. In the morning I called upon her by appointment, and together we set out in search of le Père Bonaventura, a rubicund, obese old gentleman who lived—mainly on chianti and snuff—at the top of a monumentally tall house on the fringe of the Old Town. Father Bonaventura had been warned of our coming by his colleague in London, the priest who had procured for us the dispensation from the Cardinal-Archbishop. He was a jolly old gentleman, with a moist eye, a pendulous lip, and a voice like the roar of a good-natured old lion. He settled himself in his capacious armchair, stuck a huge pair of horn-rimmed pince-nez on the extreme tip of a very prominent nose, set a fat, snuff-stained white hand on either knee,

and said, in a mellow, thunderous voice that made the windows ring, "Aha! Aha! Voilà deux belles personnes qui vont se marier!" I produced the dispensation, which he read carefully and declared to be "parfaitement en règle." He then explained to me that I must procure and hand over to him properly attested copies of my birth certificate and my register of baptism, on receipt of which he would at once proceed to put things in train for our immediate marriage. Learning that Lucy was living at an hotel, he asked her if she would not prefer to carry out her original intention of going to a convent, and on her answering decidedly in the affirmative, undertook at once to order the transference of her luggage to a convent-school situated within an easy five minutes' walk of the Villa Colbert, where I resided. "Mademoiselle," he said, "would have the advantage of pious and discreet society of her own sex, and complete liberty to come and go between the hours of nine in the morning and ten at night." He also prophesied that I should soon become a worthy and devout son of the Church, "because," he said, with that beautiful mixture of kindliness and courtliness characteristic of the good priest in his dealings with women, "it was not in human nature to resist Truth, when spoken by such a voice as that of Mademoiselle."

Father Bonaventura was as good as his word; and that night Lucy slept at the convent-school. I hate the idea of the conventual life as heartily as Thackeray himself, and, like him, think the moral and mental mutilation which is of its very essence

as wicked and senseless as the physical cuttings and crimpings inflicted on themselves by the monks and fakirs of some Oriental forms of religious abomination. But I must needs confess that I have never met a kindlier, nor, in their gentle way, a merrier company than the ladies of that establishment. Among their pupils were two or three hardly out of babyhood, the children of neighbouring families, and perhaps that companionship and the discharge of the maternal duties it entailed kept their hearts young and fresh. They swooped upon the "demoiselle anglaise" like a little flock of benevolent vultures, and could not make enough of her nor do enough for her to express their superabundant sympathy and affection. Me they regarded as an altogether wonderful kind of wild-fowl, a sort of puzzling cross between a hero and a fiend. I was going to marry "cette chère petite dame," and in so far I was an altogether delightful and admirable personage; but I was a heretic, and that made them shudder. I was probably the only specimen of that kind of animal they had ever inspected near at hand, and I am quite sure that they were rather surprised, and perhaps a little disappointed, that I had neither horns nor a tail, and smelt of nothing more diabolic than cigarette smoke.

In redemption of my promise to Father Bonaventura I wrote to my eldest brother, who still lived in my native place, asking him to procure and forward to me the documents for which the good old priest had asked—my certificates of birth and baptism. He replied promptly, enclosing the first-named document, but giving me in the place

of the second a piece of information of which until then I had been ignorant. I am, as I have already said, the youngest of my father's large family. Late in life, just before the moment of my birth, my father had become imbued with what seems to me the perfectly sensible idea that the baptism of infants is a mistake, and that it should be left to the judgment of the adult whether or not he shall receive that sacrament. I was so completely ignorant a pagan that I had not the faintest conception of what this privation would mean in the eyes of a Catholic. I went quite light-heartedly to Father Bonaventura, handed to him my certificate of birth, and translated for his benefit the passage of my brother's letter conveying the information I have just given to my readers. The effect was electrical. I have heard a fair amount of strong and picturesque language in my time, but the dramatic soliloquy in which the good old Father expressed his sense of the situation left anything of that kind in my experience before or since long miles behind. When he had exhausted his comminatory vocabulary and his breath, I begged for an explanation. It was to the effect that not having received the sacrament of baptism, which is not merely a sacrament in itself, but the indispensable key to all the gifts and graces of Holy Church, I did not in the eye of Holy Church exist at all. The Pope himself could not marry me. Mademoiselle might, were such a criminal outrage on the part of so admirable a young lady even thinkable, go through any travesty of marriage she chose in the presence of a civil authority, but

such a performance would no more constitute a marriage in the sight of any Catholic than if she were to walk out of the convent to share the home of the first man she met in the street, and it would cut her off from all communion with the Church.

This was a terrible condition of affairs. "What was to be done?" I asked. Father Bonaventura explained that all that could be done was to yield myself to the instructions of a qualified tutor in the mysteries of the Faith, to declare my adhesion to that Faith, and to supplicate admission to the Christian community by the one door of baptism.

I am far from desiring to shock the susceptibilities of any pious reader into whose hands these pages may fall, but it is unavoidable that I here make plain the position in which I found myself placed by this pronouncement. I am, both temperamentally and on long and mature reflection, not merely an unbeliever in any form of supernatural religion, but a hater of all such forms. Religious susceptibility is a note lacking from the keyboard of my temperament. I do not remember ever to have experienced the faintest thrill of religious emotion, and I recollect, at the age of six, or thereabouts, horrifying my mother by a statement to the effect that prayer was a sheer waste of time, because there was nobody to listen to it. I was led to that point-blank negation by an early experience which made an indelible impression upon my memory. I had been beaten for an offence of which I was innocent. It was a Sunday, and at chapel that morning the preacher had made use of the phrase, "Curse God and die." I had construed it as meaning

that to curse God *was* to die, that so horrible an act was necessarily followed by instant annihilation. I had gone into the garden, and there, in a passion of indignant revolt, had clenched my hands, set my milk-teeth viciously together, and uttered the words, "Damn you, God Almighty!" Nothing had happened, and I was probably the most surprised person breathing on this planet at that moment. From that instant for many years thereafter I was a point-blank atheist, but I had the common-sense to keep my convictions to myself. Then, as I lived and read and thought, came the unescapable doubt. I recognised that people vastly my superiors in natural intelligence and acquired knowledge believed what I rejected. I took to studying the religious apologists, but I found no one among them, from Paley to Newman, who did not drive further into my brain the nail of unbelief which he was doing his clumsy best to extract. A man with four arms or four legs would seem to me a scarcely more amazing creature than the intelligent and cultured person one meets every day who professes his belief in the dogmas of any form of supernatural religion. I do not question the sincerity of such people. I do not question either their intelligence or their culture. But I have given up the attempt to understand their intellectual attitude, just as, if I read the words upon a printed page, I should renounce the effort to understand what might be meant by "a square circle," or "a triangular rhomboid."

Actuated as I was—and am—by such sentiments, I found the situation in which my father's

late-born common-sense had landed me anything but a happy one. I had to explain it to Lucy, and our interview was the most painful I have ever known. Father Bonaventura, of course, spoke of it to the Mother-Superior of the convent-school, and the Sisters, by reason both of their sex and their profession, were deeply stirred, and spared no means in their power to persuade me to the end they desired. Lucy's position was, of course, vastly more painful than my own. After saying farewell to all her friends in London in the character of an immediately prospective bride it was an awkward business for the poor girl to return among them unmarried after all. She was of a singularly reticent and undemonstrative character, and to this day I do not know how much or how little personal affection she felt for me, but pride was a strong ingredient in her nature, and I know that she suffered greatly. More than once I found myself on the verge of electing to act out my part in what to me would have been merely and purely a revolting farce, to accept the course of religious instruction of which the good Father had spoken, to feign conversion and acquiescence, and to accept the rite of baptism. With a conviction on which I may not always have acted, but which is nevertheless as sincere and deep as any I possess, that straightforward honesty is the only possible road out of any conceivable dilemma, I rejected the temptation. Lucy owned that she thought me right in doing so. She made one final attempt to convert me. There was at that time a young priest preaching at a church in Nice who enjoyed a peculiar reputation both for personal sanctity and

as a pulpit orator. I have no doubt that he deserved both parts of his reputation—there could be none that he merited the second. I had accompanied Lucy to his church on the first Sunday night she spent in Nice, and his discourse was one of the most remarkable efforts of human speech I have ever listened to. He was a gaunt, loose-limbed, ill-made man, with a face which in repose was singularly harsh and repellent, and a voice much more remarkable for power than for sweetness, but I do not think that anybody who listened to him thought of those defects after the first minute. He had a sort of daimonic energy, and attacked his chosen theme as a barbarian athlete fighting for life and liberty in the Roman amphitheatre might have flung himself upon the gladiator set to slay him. Would I, Lucy asked, meet this priest and talk with him? With absolutely no expectation of either profit or pleasure from the encounter, I consented. The interview lasted an hour or so, and during that time I do not think I spoke a hundred words. If absolute certainty of the truth of Catholic doctrine and fulgurant scorn of the blind and impious wretches who dared to doubt it could have shaken a mind which makes cold reason the final test of all things, I should have left his society a fervent believer. As things were I remained untouched, except by admiration of his sincerity and of the torrential eloquence with which he expressed it. A moment before we parted he went as suddenly quiet as he had previously grown excited. Would I, he asked me, give Faith a chance—just a chance—to assert itself in my heart?

Would I promise him to wear *this* for a whole year? I could carry it round my neck, under my dress, and none would know that I wore it. "This" was a little oval tin medal, stamped with the image of a saint, and with some brief Latin inscription whose wording I have forgotten. I readily gave him the promise, and he hung the medal round my neck murmuring, "Ça se fera! Ça se fera!" shook hands with me, and went away.

Lucy and I came to an arrangement which was perhaps as good as any possible in the circumstances. We accorded each other a six months' common truce, to be spent on my part in considering whether I could join the Church, and on hers whether she could renounce it. She returned to London. A little later I received a packet containing my letters, her engagement ring, a few trifles of jewelry I had given her, and nothing else. It had taken Providence six-and-twenty years to mature this little joke, but it came off quite successfully at last.

I have outlived most of my enthusiasms by this time. Perhaps they were never very robust, and partook more or less of the general slackness of my character. But if I have ever been really in earnest about anything in my entire life, it was in my views on the religious question. I have certainly thought longer and more intensely on that and on its innumerable cognate themes than on any other of the serious problems which every thinking man born into the world must needs settle for himself. I have for many years past made it a

fixed habit to hold a sort of intellectual stock-taking from time to time, and to reconsider my position in regard to those questions. And it is many years since I have appreciably added to or deducted from the nett total of the result. In the final sentence of the last of the series of letters in which James Anthony Froude summed up the history and the results of the Oxford Counter-Reformation, he says of the Roman Church—"if an institution with such a history behind it is an exceptional instrument to bear witness to God's existence, if it be alone the voice through which He speaks to man, and makes known His nature and His will; then the attempt to understand the world, and what goes on in it, had better be abandoned in despair." Those words are truer, perhaps, of the Roman Church than of any other religious community that has ever existed, but they apply—or so it seems to me—with more or less force to every other body which has ever based itself on the dogmas of supernatural religion. The Catholic Church has a bigger mass of wrong, cruelty, and oppression to answer for than any other religious body, no doubt, but there never has been any religious body which has not tortured and oppressed up to the full limits of any powers it was permitted to possess And this is natural, logical, inevitable, just, and right. For if I do really and veritably hold that I am the repository of a truth necessary to the eternal salvation of my brother man, I am a traitor and a coward if I do not persecute to death and beyond it any teacher of a rival faith. My position in such a case towards a teacher of a rival faith

is the position an honest dweller on a dangerous shore holds towards a professional wrecker who purposely lights false fires to lure ships to destruction; or towards some insane or ignorant person whose signals, honestly meant, would have the same disastrous results. I must stop such person, be he criminal, lunatic, or ignoramus, from wrecking innocent lives; and if I can do it at no less cost than *his* life, it is my bounden duty to kill him. Tolerance about the colour of my neighbour's necktie or the shape of his hat is all very well, but tolerance of a belief which is going to plunge his soul into immortal torment is a burning sin. Nobody who has once clearly glimpsed this truth will wonder afterwards that the most pitiless persecutors have often been among the finest specimens of human kind; that Aurelius and Torquemada, who were men of every virtue, tortured and slaughtered for conscience' sake, while a pair of hoggish sensualists like Commodus and Heliogabalus did not trouble to persecute at all. Our second Charles and our second James were both poor creatures, but if we must needs choose between two such specimens of the infinitely little, James was the better of the two, and proved his superiority by the very persecutions which have made his name a byword.

I have seen it stated that a Church of Science, were it once established and dominant, might persecute as bitterly as any of its predecessors. I cannot see why. Since Science leaves out of consideration altogether the postulate of Eternal Life, it can never hold that belief or disbelief

in any of its dogmas can benefit or injure anybody to the extent sufficient to justify persecution. A man who denies the sphericity of the earth or the Darwinian doctrine of the descent of man injures nobody, not even himself. A man who sins against scientific fact, who holds, for instance, that cyanide of potassium is a good food, or that vitriol is a wholesome beverage, will not be likely to make converts, and a truly scientific society would be rather glad than otherwise when he tested his beliefs on his own person. A shortage of idiots would be the last of philosophic fears.

Thinking as I do, I have sometimes been made rather angry by the conventional and almost universal belief that it is a sort of duty to be tender with other people's religious convictions, that it is bad form to tell religious believers that their beliefs are nonsensical. I was wrong in feeling angry, and I will presently say why I think I was wrong. But I do not find, either actually or historically, that the religious believer holds himself under any very binding obligation to be tender with people whose ways of thinking are different from his own. I have been told—politely by a broad-clothed curate in a drawing-room, and with furious impoliteness by a corduroy-clad orator in Hyde Park—that I devote myself to eternal torment by refusing to believe statements so natively incredible that I have passed a good part of my life in wondering how they ever came to be made I do not find that the earliest confessors of the Christian religion were conspicuously tender to the professors of the established creed which they

sought to overthrow. It was a poor creed, no doubt, a thing of posturings and lustrations and charms and outward observances. But it must have had a core of reality for the nobler sort of man who practised it. There is to me a note of nobility and a note, too, of infinite pathos in Farrar's explanation of the day-and-night, moment-to-moment struggle to keep pure within the Law. "If but one person could only for one day keep the whole Law and not offend in one point the troubles of Israel would be ended, and the Messiah at last would come." We may easily believe that the hope, for ever deferred, of one day performing that impossibility and of ensuring that glorious redemption broke many a humble, pious human heart. People at once so righteous and so self-righteous as the Pharisees would have feelings as keen as most other people's, to say the least of it, and would relish ridicule and denunciation as little as any latter-day Christian.

The real reasons why the scientific agnostic should be tender with the old type of believer are really perfectly simple. The statement that violent language is bad form is true, little as the average religious person acts upon it. And scientific truth, unlike religion—to judge by history—in this as in other respects, needs no violence to make its way. The deductions of science get accepted just as the multiplication table got accepted—because it is pure waste of time to question them. Truths, for the proclamation of which men have been burned, are to-day more potent influences on the life of the Pope himself than the dogmas of which he is the

official guardian. Telephones were established in the Vatican some years ago, and work as well there as elsewhere.

I remember once telling Robert Buchanan how completely the words he put into the mouth of his Philip Vanderdecken expressed my personal religious and philosophical evolution, and the goal at which I ultimately arrived, and at which I fancy I may venture to prophesy that I shall stay for the rest of my life.

"All this season
During my residence among you,
I've sucked the poor, stale scraps of reason
Your last philosophers have flung you.
I've read through Comte, the Catechism,
(Half common-sense, half crank and schism),
And Harriet Martineau's synopsis;
Puzzled through Littré's monstr' informous
Encyclopædia enormous,
Until my brain grew blank as Topsy's.
I've sucked the bloodless books of Mill,
As void of gall as any pigeon;
I've swallowed Congreve's patent pill
To purge man's liver of Religion;
I've tried my leisure to amuse
With Freddy Harrison's reviews;
I've thumbed the essays of John Morley,
So positive they made me poorly:—

* * * * *

"The *Leben Jesu*, Renan's *Vie*,
I also studied thoroughly;
I vivisected cats with Lewes,
I tortured gentle dogs with Ferrier,
Found out just what grimalkin's mew is,
And how tails wag in pug and terrier;
But came, however close I sought,
No nearer to the riddle of Thought.

* * * * *

"Then finally, in sheer despair,
Burn'd deep with Scepticism's caustic,
Found Spencer staring at the air,
Crying, 'God knows if God is there!"
And, in a trice, became agnostic!"

It is to Spencer that I owe the intellectual calm in which the last four-and-twenty years of my life have been passed, a calm which I believe to be henceforth unbreakable by any shadowy reincarnation of the old doubts.

"The demonstration absolute
Mortal nor angel can confute"

of the division of the entire universe into two clean halves, the Knowable and the Unknowable, which occupies the opening pages of that truly colossal book, "First Principles," has not, I am aware, escaped philosophical onslaught, but I have never heard or read any attack upon it which was anything more or anything better than the merest chopping of metaphysical chaff. All the argument "about it and about" to which I had listened from "doctor and sage" for so many wasted years were swept aside by the superb common-sense of that wonderful utterance. The study of the infinitely various phenomena by which we are surrounded is a necessity of our nature, and results in incalculable good to us and to our species. The belief that our little minds can ever grasp the attributes of the great underlying cause of those phenomena is a folly—I had well-nigh written, a blasphemy. The hope that, in long ages yet to come, our intelligence may expand to the capacity requisite for such a

comprehension may be dwelt upon by those who care to toy with intellectual phantoms. To me, it has no interest.

In some other matters I have parted company with Spencer. As a sociologist he is no longer what he once was to me, and I have turned from the empty husks and the chill water of his fierce individualism to the sustaining wine and fortifying bread of Socialism. I have my doubts whether, could Spencer have lived his long life over again, he would have drawn from it the sociological lessons his actual existence was spent in teaching. We know from his own pen by what a terrible tedium his final years were darkened, and I think it more than likely that that tedium was deepened, if not altogether caused, by his recognition that much of the doctrine with which his name will be most closely connected was based upon error. I owe that suspicion to certain words he let fall to me on the only occasion on which I enjoyed the honour of personal intercourse with him. Walking up and down the lawn of Buchanan's house in Maresfield Gardens, I told him, in a momentary absence of our host, what a load of personal obligation I felt under to "First Principles," and added that I intended to devote the reading hours of the next two or three years to a thorough study of his entire output. "What have you read of mine?" he asked. I told him—the volume I have already mentioned, "The Study of Sociology," "The Man versus the State," "Social Statics," "The Data of Ethics," and the brochure, "Education." "Then," said Spencer—and it was the only time I have ever

heard such a counsel from the lips of any writer regarding his own work—"I should say that you have read quite enough." He fell silent for a moment, and then added, "I have passed my life in beating the air." It goes without saying that no truly great man has ever been satisfied with his own achievement. The contrast between the little he has actually accomplished and the much he had hoped, in the ardour of youth, to effect, must always exert a saddening influence, and the greater the man the greater that contrast will necessarily appear. But some incommunicable note in Spencer s voice told me that that reflection was not the only, perhaps not even the principal, cause of his melancholy.

I look back on the time spent on the Riviera as by far the happiest of that period of my life. Christie was at the summit of his reputation, our joint circumstances were affluent, and the climate and scenery of the neighbourhood are both so beautiful that, granted merely physical health and the absence of any real trouble, existence can hardly be other than a joy. We rented the Villa Colbert, situated nearly on the crown of Montboron, just off the Old Villefranche Road. It was furnished with the barest necessaries, to which we made no addition, for all either of us needed was a table whereat to work and a bed wherein to sleep. To our right were the lower summits of the Alps; at our feet the red-tiled roofs of Nice; beyond, across the valley, the bald scalp of Cimiez; to the left, the wide sweep of the bay and the blue waters of the

Mediterranean; and on exceptionally clear days could be seen, like a low-lying cloud, the rocky coast of Corsica. The garden of the villa was a wilderness of roses, which seem, in my recollection of the place, to have bloomed all the year round, although I do not make that as a statement of botanical fact. The precipice in which it terminated on one side divided it from the next of the innumerable terraces into which the declivity of the mountain is cut to prevent its thin clothing of soil being washed away by the autumn rains, and was masked by a line of alternate aloes and orange-trees, the last bearing fruit of a beautiful burnished golden-green, and of a quite unsurpassably acrid and bitter flavour—a bitter which bit to the bone of the palate. There were, too, several eucalyptus trees, whose pungent balsamic perfume seemed to concentrate at compound interest in the scorching heat, and to this day a chance whiff of that odour brings back the aspect of the place with startling clearness.

Of a morning I wrote at Christie's dictation, the afternoon was occupied by my own work, and after our early dinner we either descended into the town for a game of billiards, or ran into Monte Carlo for a night's play at the tables. Monte Carlo is, I should fancy, one of the queerest and most individual places on earth, with an atmosphere all its own. The Metropolis of Play, the citadel and donjon-keep of the great Goddess of Chance, it is in itself a most eloquent, though most ineffectual and unregarded, sermon against the practices on which its prosperity is built. A barren, sterile

promontory on which unaided Nature could not raise so much as a blade of grass, has been converted into a paradise of beauty and luxury at the cost of the countless fools who have flocked there for the past fifty years; a human torrent which reaches flood-tide in the winter months, and never ceases to trickle briskly even in the hottest of the dog-days. There is no place in the whole world where money is so exclusively the subject of men's thoughts, and none in which it is less valued or more lightly flung away. It is difficult even to a cool temperament, and to an ardent one impossible, to remember the true value of gold and silver in those lofty, handsome apartments, musical with the crystalline clinking of piles of napoleons and five-franc pieces and the sibilant rustle of bank-paper, and echoing all day long to the ceaseless croak of the croupiers who dispense them with such a curious mingling of impassivity and keen-eyed alertness. A man who picked up a bag of gold or a thousand-franc note in the street would think himself marvellously lucky, and would never dream of reproaching Fortune with niggardliness towards him; but what is ten times that sum, picked up just as easily at Monte Carlo, compared with the serried piles of bullion protected by those weary, watchful eyes?

Thackeray, generally a most close and accurate observer, speaks in "The Newcomes" of the now abolished gaming-saloons at Baden as of a theatre in which the student of his kind might study every phase of the quick-changing passions natural to the gambler—delirious delight and grim despair,

exhibited in distorted features and frenzied imprecations. I can only suppose that our generation has learned to cloak its emotions with more decency, for in all the many hours I spent in the Salles de Jeu of the great "hell," euphemistically known as "le Cercle des Étrangers," I witnessed no such spectacle, and rarely heard a word which might not have been spoken in a Sunday school. Tragedies occur at Monte Carlo — they are vastly more numerous than its most constant habitués are aware of, for one of the heaviest of the many heavy expenditures made by the Administration figures on their books as "frais de Publicité," which is simply blackmail paid to the more important French journals for silence regarding scandals and suicides —but the public demeanour of the gamblers is decent even to the point of dulness as a general thing. Only at very long intervals do the passions which seethe below the surface overtly proclaim themselves without regard of time and place. I arrived one evening to find one of the tables covered by a black cloth, and on inquiry was told that only an hour previously a man—name, nationality, profession, and other details unknown —had scattered his brains over it and his fellow players with a pistol bullet. The other tables were as calmly busy as ever; and, although I watched the local papers assiduously, I never saw a word about the affair, nor did I ever hear it referred to after the day on which it occurred. Monte Carlo is essentially a city of strangers—no single item in the crowd knows more than one or two scattered individuals among the throngs that fill it, and each

is too intent on his own business or pleasure to take much heed of his neighbour. This easy callousness, common to all holiday resorts, blended with the unique moral atmosphere of Monte Carlo, takes strange and brutal forms sometimes. I had a slight acquaintance with a gentleman, a Russian nobleman, of whom another acquaintance told me a characteristic little story. He was strolling in the gardens one evening when, close at hand, he heard the crack of a pistol. His companion, and innumerable other people, had rushed to the spot from which the sound proceeded. Not so Baron ——. As the report reached his ears he plucked his watch from his pocket and noted the exact moment—nine minutes to nine. He hurried to a table, and in half a dozen turns of the wheel had broken the bank by piling maximums on the number so indicated and on the *transversale* in which it stands.

It is a true proverb—*on ne prête qu'aux riches*. Just as such human monsters of iniquity as Nero and Cæsar Borgia and Alexander VI. were accused by their contemporaries of crimes of which they were no doubt perfectly capable, but which they did not happen to commit, and of which impartial history has absolved them, so Monte Carlo, that Sodom among modern cities, bears the blame of much done within her walls which is really no fault of hers. Suicides at Monte Carlo there are many, but not all who there untimely cut their mortal thread do so merely because the capricious deity who presides over the tables has been unkind to them. Men who are desperate before they set foot in the place; fraudulent trustees; defaulting cashiers; all sorts of

rogues at odds with fortune, go there to play their last desperate stake, to make one despairing effort to retrieve their imperilled honour. No doubt, a certain percentage succeed, and Monte Carlo, which has ruined so many honester people, has very likely saved from the rope or the razor many a scoundrel by favouring his desperate ventures on the black or the red. For people *do* win there—indeed, were it not so, and did nobody ever come away a gainer, who would ever play there at all? My own small adventures there shall presently be told, but they may well wait while the feats of a more august votary of Fortune are recounted. I was present one night when the Marquis de Talleyrand—a great-great-grandnephew of Napoleon's astute and shameless Minister—entered the rooms, and began a game so tremendous that scores of smaller punters left their play for the superior excitement of watching his. He played maximum every turn of the wheel on every possible hazard; *en plein*, *aux coins*, *à cheval*, *en transversale*, column, dozen, and the simple chances—*un vrai jeu d'enfer*, as I heard an awestruck voice whisper beside me. Charmed perhaps by such magnificent audacity, and conquered by the cool indifference with which he took her favours, Our Lady of Circumstance seemed to have given the fateful marble into the keeping of Monsieur le Marquis that night. He won every one of those awful *coups*, and broke the bank in less than ten minutes, and went away amid a roar of applause in which the very croupiers joined, with the same air of rather bored amiability he had worn throughout; his pockets, and the corsage of the

lady who accompanied him, bulging with bank-notes. I was greatly tickled by the conduct of one of the witnesses of that colossal gamble, an old, purblind Jew, with huge, flapping, elephantine ears jutting out under a skull-cap of black velvet, who had remained utterly unconscious of it. He sat just opposite to where the Marquis stood, betting five francs a time on the black. At every turn of the wheel a croupier raked in that meagre little stake, while his confrère handed to the Marquis a solid wad of bank-paper, but when the little old Hebrew's last coin—or the last he cared to risk—had gone, he turned to me and said, almost with tears in his voice, "*Ach! mon Tieu, guelle jance bour la panque!*"

I think it is Balzac who somewhere says that while everybody is eager to extract profit from his better qualities, it occurs to nobody that, in given circumstances, his worst weakness might become his strongest asset. I have already frankly confessed my total imbecility in matters of finance and calculation. It has been a serious drawback in the general business of life, but it was the making of me in my dealings at Monte Carlo. Just as great mathematicians have spent years of wasted toil in trying to square the circle, you will meet people of very respectable calculative powers who believe it possible to invent a "system" to make winning at roulette a certainty. Among our acquaintances in Nice was a gentleman who had once been very wealthy, and who was stated to have lost seven millions of francs by the exploitation of a series of such systems of his own invention. Yet, when he turned up one day at the Villa Colbert with the

statement that he had at last discovered "le vrai, le seul système philosophique," those incorrigible and hopeless optimists, Christie and Herman, sallied forth into Nice to buy a miniature roulette table and a couple of thousand beans for counters, and, under the instruction of M. de Paroli, devoted many hours to testing his new martingale. It worked beautifully — with the beans — and Herman had almost made up his mind as to which of the palatial villas on the Promenade des Anglais he would buy with the pillage of the bank when three nights rigid adherence to the system at Monte Carlo itself reduced him and Christie to temporary penury. Being placidly convinced that the more perfect the system the less I should be able to understand or practise it, I resisted its contagion, and prospered. My plan, which I found to act excellently, was simplicity itself. I never risked more than a hundred francs on any single day. If I lost the whole of my day's capital, I accepted the loss and went away. If my luck was good, I backed it so long as it held, and stopped when it turned. By pursuing these tactics throughout the eighteen months during which Nice was my headquarters, I must have made a very fair amount of money. All through my stay on the Riviera I had a noble time, and denied myself nothing, and when the next of my periodic rows with Christie parted us again and I was thrown on my own resources I had a collection of books and a wardrobe which I found extremely useful in tiding me over the following spell of poverty. There are, as a matter of notorious fact, dozens of people every season at Monte Carlo to whom the tables are a

source of steady revenue. They never risk more than a stated small sum—one or two louis—a day, and when fate is kind to them they may win ten or fifty or a hundred or a thousand times that amount.

It was not long after the episode of my abortive marriage scheme that I found one of my few regular engagements in newspaper work on the staff of the London edition of the *New York Herald.* Mr. Gordon Bennett had been inspired to that adventure in journalism by the brilliant success of the Paris edition, but, if he had anticipated anything like a similar triumph, the result of the experiment must have been a grievous disappointment to him. One of the many reasons for its failure was the amazingly wrong-headed fashion in which it was managed. During the eleven months of my connection with it, the paper was edited by no fewer than fourteen different people. I have been told that the reason why I left it was that I was discharged in consequence of an irreverent comment on that circumstance. I went to sleep—so the story ran—on two chairs in the sub-editors' room, having previously given an office-boy a shilling on condition that he woke me at a certain hour and told me what quarter the wind was in and who was editing the *Herald.* That I may have done so is likely enough, though I have no memory of the circumstance, but it was certainly not the cause of my leaving the paper. I resigned voluntarily, in the following circumstances :—

Sir—then Mr.—Henry Irving had revived at the Lyceum Theatre, "in commemoration of the

centenary of the French Revolution," Watts Phillips' melodrama *The Dead Heart.* I went to see it. I thought—and think—that it was one of the silliest and most futile lumps of rubbish it has ever been my bad luck to see. Henry Irving was among the half-dozen greatest European actors of the latter half of the nineteenth century, but it is a regrettable fact that he was also one of the worst judges of drama that ever held in his hands the destinies of an important theatre. So long as he stuck to Shakespeare and Goethe he was all right, for the simple and sufficing reason that he could not go wrong, but when he went on his own judgment he infallibly made a mess of it. Another of his revivals was George Colman's *Iron Chest*, an appallingly bad adaptation of a dull and stupid novel written, in some queer mental aberration, by Godwin, the profound political thinker to whom the world owes "Political Justice." Among Irving's original productions was *The Mad Doctor*, one of the woodenest and least convincing melodramas that ever got itself produced, which Irving proclaimed —before its production—to be as fine a piece of work as Erckmann-Chatrian's *Bells.* The appalling badness of *The Dead Heart* seemed somehow to have communicated its contagion to the generally admirable actors who appeared in it. They included Irving himself, Sir Squire Bancroft, Edward Righton, Miss Ellen Terry, and Miss Kate Phillips, and I never saw any one of those excellent comedians to less advantage. As I was eating my supper after the performance in the Marble Hall—whose place now knows it no more—the ablest of

the many editors of the *Herald*, and one of the most kindly and friendly men I have ever met, John Reid, came and sat beside me. I gave him my impressions of my evening's experience, with which—he had seen the show on the previous night—he heartily concurred. "The worst of it is," he continued, "——" (naming the dramatic critic of the *Herald*) "praised the blamed thing. How can we take it back without looking foolish?" "Let me write an open letter to Irving," I suggested. "You shall," said Reid; "and I'll put it into next Sunday's issue." So said, so done. I wrote the letter before I went to bed that night, and handed it in to Reid next day.

At that date, and for some time thereafter, the late Joseph Hatton occupied some undefined position on the *Herald*. What functions he fulfilled I never knew, but he had some sort of power, and Reid—an autocrat, as every good editor is, and needs must be—rather resented this. Hatton, as all the world knows, was an intimate personal friend of Irving. He had edited the great actor's "Impressions of America," and was one of his most sturdy admirers and partisans. At the moment of commissioning me to write my Open Letter, Reid had remarked, "Hatton will rile up at this, sure, but it's going in, and if he doesn't like it he'll just have to lump it." On the day preceding the appearance of the letter a curious thing happened. Reid, returning from lunch, met Hatton coming out of his—Reid's—room. Reid had left a proof of my letter to Irving on the spike-file standing on his desk. On looking for it, he found it gone. Returning from dinner he

found it on the spike again. Reid's conclusion was that Hatton having read the letter—which he had a perfect right to do—had gone across to the Lyceum, scarce a hundred yards away from the *Herald* office on the other side of the Strand, and had shown it to Irving, disclaiming all responsibility for its authorship, inspiration, or appearance. Who its author was, he could not know, although he might possibly guess, for it was signed by the pseudonym "The Candid Friend," and nobody but Reid, myself, and the compositor who had stuck the type, was aware even of its existence.

The letter appeared, and made its little fleeting half-hour of talk and conjecture, as such things will. Reid professed himself delighted with it, and suggested that I "might make myself a nuisance to a whole heap of respectable Christian citizens" by writing a similar letter every week to some selected celebrity over the same signature. I consented, and for some nine or ten weeks "The Candid Friend" exhibited perhaps more candour than friendship regarding the personalities and performances of as many prominent figures in the theatrical and literary worlds. The identity at first concealed behind the signature leaked out, as was inevitable, and I received a certain number of letters, abusive or laudatory, from various people, according as they sympathised or otherwise with my judgments. Reid had raised my salary, and for the only time in my life I found myself in receipt of a steady ten pounds a week. Once again the world looked bright before me, in spite of the continued rejections of "A Song of Sixpence."

My Nemesis was but sleeping, however, and that with one eye open. Reid had held the editorial chair for some fifteen or sixteen weeks—a longer time than any of his successors—but he was elderly, a free-liver, and a martyr to some painful chest-complaint with which the atmosphere of London held no truce. He was suddenly and peremptorily ordered to Algiers. A week after his departure, which was loudly lamented by everybody on the staff, I was again supping in the Marble Hall when my colleague, Harry Dam, entered with a strange gentleman, whom he presented as Mr. ——, the new editor of the *Herald*, just arrived from New York. In the course of conversation Mr. —— asked me, "Say, Mr. Murray, do you happen to know Bram Stoker's address?" I replied that I did not, but that he could easily get it by applying at the Lyceum Theatre. Mr. —— volunteered the statement that he was one of Mr. Stoker's closest friends "on the other side." I cannot say precisely that such an "ice-talon'd prong as shot through the brain and pericardium of Balaam" when he heard his ass speak assailed me at that moment, but I did murmur to myself the sporting query, "With Joseph Hatton still in his place of undefined power in the *Herald* office and a gentleman who is a close friend of Mr. Bram Stoker installed as editor—what price 'The Candid Friend'?" The blow fell promptly, as I had anticipated. The next day Mr. ——, in the friendliest fashion in the world, gave me editorially to understand that my letters must cease. I replied that if they stopped I left the paper. "I shall be sorry to lose your services," replied the

editor, "but the letters must stop. London's had enough of them, and we mustn't bore the public." I pointed out that that was hardly likely to happen, because the public wasn't reading the *Herald*. Mr. ——, with the delightful American bonhomie which welcomes many jests at which the average Englishman would probably be angry, accorded a smile to my epigram, but was adamantine on the main point. The continuance of "The Candid Friend" was vetoed, so I left the paper.

I acted foolishly in doing so, from every point of view. It was foolish, in the first place, to throw away a regular and sufficient salary merely for a momentary pique, a thing no man is justified in doing unless he is sure of another berth as good, which was certainly not the case with me. The Letters had given me a certain reputation, but it was a reputation of the wrong sort, as a fault-finder and a firebrand, and I did not find that there was any marked rush on the part of editors to engage me. I have always hated journalism, and in that also I have been unwise, because—let any literary aspirant into whose hands these pages may fall take note of this—there is no such school in the world for a youngster who desires to make the writing of fiction his profession as is offered by the daily work of journalism. It brings him into intimate touch with all kinds of people and sends him into all kinds of places which, in any other line of life, he would probably never see. There is no social extreme between—and including—an Archbishop and a hangman with which he may not find himself in contact at some moment or other. In a newspaper office

a young man sucks in knowledge of the world as Joey Ladle took in his alcoholic stimulant, by the pores. And although, during his novitiate, journalism may give him few or no opportunities of airing his powers as a writer, the merely literary training it affords is excellent of its sort. It teaches him to think clearly, and to express his meaning perspicuously. And it is the one profession I know of—except the stage—which pays the neophyte while teaching him his business. The articled lawyer's clerk, the aspirant to the Bench or the Church, the medical student, the art student, all have to undergo a more or less costly apprenticeship. The young journalist, even if he starts on the lowest rung on the staff of a small provincial paper, is paid at least something from the start. There is, too, this other advantage, that a young man of talent, either literary or merely journalistic—the two talents are getting more and more widely differentiated with every passing year—is certain of success if he will only stick to his work. Journalism presents the curious anomaly of an absolutely open profession, open to all who care to enter it, which yet never seems overcrowded, and in which talent, if its possessor will simply exercise a little common-sense humility, and be content awhile to do the daily work for the daily wage, is certain to win its way. My personal failure as a journalist has never made me blind to the truth of what I am now writing. It was wholly and entirely my own fault. I contemned the work it offered me, thinking it trivial—which is a half-truth, and unimportant—which is an entire falsehood. It is, as I have said elsewhere, a serious

mistake to think so, as if a man should admire the completed palace and yet despise the individual bricks of which it is built.

I have many pleasant reminiscences of my time on the *Herald*. I have never met a merrier, brighter, cleverer, and all-round more friendly and pleasant crowd than "the boys" who contributed to its columns. John Reid in especial was a perfectly angelic editor. He was iron hard on negligence or incompetence, and would hold no truce with them. Like most Americans of talent he was saturnine and sententious, and if he did not like a man he could make himself supremely and memorably nasty. I remember him sitting in his armchair, with the perennial stump of a big cigar, which never seemed to vary in length, in a corner of his mouth, with one eye shut and the other expressing an absolute and most galling contempt for his interlocutor, and saying, at the conclusion of a flowing period which the latter had obviously fancied to be most impressive and convincing, "Sir, you make me tired. You have more words and fewer ideas than any other person I have yet struck in my airthly pilgrimage." I remember also a phrase he applied to a certain member of the *Herald* staff who came over from the States with a huge reputation as a journalistic "hustler." "To go to that man for notions," said Reid, "is like dredging hell for oysters." But I have never been better pleased in my life than with the quiet, stolid nod with which he rewarded such work of mine as he really liked, and the low-voiced comment, "That's right, sonnie."

Every member of the staff of the *Herald*—which,

be it remembered, was a seven-day paper—had one day's holiday per week. My day of recreation coincided with that of Ervin B. Hawkins, a bright young gentleman who hailed from an extensive region which he was in the habit of describing as the "Wild and Woolly West." He had a consuming thirst for the stock attractions of London, and as his cicerone I saw more of the metropolis than I have ever seen before or since. We went on one occasion to the Tower. After seeing the regulation sights, with which—especially the axe and block and the Crown jewels—he was much delighted, he suggested that there must be many other spectacles in a building so old and so intimately associated with the most romantic episodes of English history, to which everybody might not be admitted. We were lucky enough to get hold of an intelligent Beefeater, who knew vastly more of the history of the Tower than one gathers from the stereotyped gabble of the ordinary guide. Among other places to which he conducted us was the vaulted semi-cellar in which prisoners, political, ecclesiastical, and others, were tortured. It is used now—or was then—as a record room. The Beefeater pointed out to us the low beds of solid masonry on which, in unimaginable torments, many a score of nameless wretches had sobbed and shrieked their lives away. He showed us the four holes in the stone pavement in which the rack had been clamped down, and in the farthest recess of that horrible Gehenna, a dim circle of concrete, rather lighter in tone than the time-stained masonry which surrounded it. That circle,

the Beefeater told us, marked the site of an old dry well in which some years earlier the hideously broken and mutilated skeletons of some scores of human beings had been found. I do not think that the pure air and broad sunlight could have been much sweeter to any creature who had passed through the terrors of that dreadful place than they seemed to me as I emerged from it. I was on the verge of actual physical sickness. Hawkins and I strolled along in pensive silence for awhile, when he remarked, in a musing, rather envious kind of tone, "We've got nothing like that in the States." I tried to cheer him by pointing out that America had possessed the institution of chattel slavery, that it had produced the Trusts, the cities of Pittsburg and Chicago, and Mr. Jay Gould, but he refused to be comforted. "It was horrible. It makes a man's blood turn the wrong way. But it gives the country an atmosphere." I have often been a witness of the indescribable sensations with which a man of English blood and alien birth beholds the relics of our island history. I remember on one occasion crossing the North Sea from Ostend in company with a typical Yankee, hard-headed, cool, unimaginative, sardonic. I can remember the sudden pressure of his hand upon my shoulder, and the choking croak with which he extended his arm towards the horizon and said, "My God! Is that *England?*" And when I answered "Yes," he settled his elbows upon the rail and stared at the broadening strip of land as hungrily as Christian devoured the distant hills of Beulah, with the silent tears running down his face. I can remember

taking a little Australian lady for her first visit to Westminster Abbey, and the wild wonder with which, following the direction of my finger, she read upon the slab beneath her feet, "Sacred to the Memory of Charles Dickens," and recognised that she was standing over the dust of the splendid and delightful genius who had given us "David Copperfield." But my friend Hawkins's patriotic envy of the Tower torture-chamber did, as he might himself have expressed it, "yank the bun" over any other similar expression of enthusiasm.

Reid, knowing that I had more or less acquaintance with a fair number of British celebrities, developed a habit of sending me out to collect opinions regarding any interesting "mystery" of the day. That lurid and ever-vanishing nightmare of criminality, "Jack the Ripper," was then pervading the Whitechapel district, and I inspected his last victim, lying on the slab of the mortuary. Reid suggested that I should go forth and interview any celebrities I could find regarding the identity of the criminal. I called on Walter Besant, Robert Buchanan, James Payn, and Henry Labouchere. I was—or flattered myself that I was—a bit of a favourite with Mr. Labouchere, whom I had interviewed on similarly curious themes on several other occasions. He received me with the query, "Well, young man, what's the imbecility this time?" "I have come," I said, "to ask you if you have any theory regarding the identity of 'Jack the Ripper'?" "Well," he said, rolling the eternal cigarette in his mouth—I never saw him without the cigarette, except on one occasion, when I caught a glimpse

of him in his place in the House of Commons—"I don't know that I've formed any theory. But I suppose you'd like one?" I replied that I should be greatly obliged if he could evolve one for the occasion. "Then," said he, "I'll tell you what. Say it's me. Lots of people will believe it, and I promise you I won't contradict it." The *New York Herald* issued a special placard next day, bearing the inscription, "Identity of Jack the Ripper—Astounding Confession!" And for once, at least, the public read the *Herald.*

One memorable consequence of my connection with the *Herald* was a meeting with George Meredith, with whom I passed a day at his house at Box Hill in the following circumstances. It had struck me that "The Candid Friend" letters, supplemented with other critical matter, might make a saleable volume, and I had forwarded the script to Messrs. Chapman & Hall, for whom, at that time, Mr. Meredith acted as reader. I received from him a letter, the gist of which was that he thought the project inadvisable, although he was kind enough to describe my utterances as those of "a stout, natural voice, contrasting notably with the cluck and gabble of the Newspaper Press." Such an intimation I regarded as final, and wrote him a brief note to that effect, replied to in turn by an invitation to spend a day with him. I selected a beautiful Sunday morning in early spring. The maid who admitted me to the garden at Box Hill told me that Mr. Meredith was at work in the châlet, but I was kindly received by his eldest son, who shortly after died, and by Miss Meredith, who

were sunning themselves on the front steps of the house. We were talking together when I heard a slow step crunching the gravel behind me, and the young lady said, "Here is my father." I rose, and confronted a tall old man, whose extreme leanness made him appear of more than his actual height. He was loosely clad in grey tweeds and a soft felt hat, and carried a crooked oaken walking-stick. I had seen a profile portrait of him, published as a frontispiece to one of his books, but certainly should never unaided have recognised him as its original. It had represented a face of more than feminine delicacy, with an almost angelic softness of expression. That is not at all a description of Mr. Meredith as he appeared in the year 1889. His features, independently of his grey beard and moustache, were strongly masculine, and expressed physical and intellectual virility of the highest and keenest sort. It was the face of an intellectual gladiator rather than that of a poet, and had nothing in it of the ascetic or the saint. He welcomed me with a simple and most encouraging cordiality—I had been rather afraid of meeting him, for I considered, and still consider, him very much the greatest man I have ever had the privilege of encountering in intimate converse. He had a curious and memorable voice, a voice which gripped the ear somewhat as chianti grips the palate. His manner might be described by that conveniently nebulous phrase, "old-fashioned," with a breadth, repose, rotundity, and stateliness seldom met with nowadays. He spoke with a marked drawl, and with the accent common to English gentlemen of

the period of the Piccadilly-weeper whisker and the peg-top pantaloon—the accent of Sothern's Lord Dundreary. Having shaken hands with me, he dropped into a canvas camp-stool, his legs stretched out in front of him and resting on the heels; his hands clasped on the crook of his walking-stick; and I beheld the indubitable physical original of Dr. Shrapnel. Like the immortal Doctor, he had a huge tuft of obstinate grey hair bristling up over his forehead, and he had the habit of constantly endeavouring to smooth it back into its place among the mass which he attributes to Nevil Beauchamp's political Mentor. I was soon aware that these were not the only particulars in which he resembled Dr. Shrapnel. He had a way of divagating suddenly from dialogue into monologue, and of adding cryptic asides, often accompanied by brief, grim chuckles, to an interlocutor invisible to his companions. He would have been a trying associate to an intellectually lazy man, for he talked precisely as he writes, and kept his hearer's wits, as he keeps his reader's, perpetually astrain to follow the thread of his ideas. At that date he was but coming into the kingdom he had fairly won years earlier; the critics who had so long neglected him had still a habit of accusing him of intentional obscurity and *excentricité voulue*, but that day's talk with him quite dispelled any such illusion from my mind. An involved reticulation of thought and quaintness of expression are in him no affectations, but as purely natural as the sledge-hammer forthrightness of Macaulay or the perfect plainness of Defoe. Year after year of public neglect and critical

inappreciation have had, no doubt, some influence in indurating those peculiarities, as they probably had had in the cases of his similarly treated contemporaries, Carlyle and Browning. Artists who find the best they can give contemned or disregarded by the great mass, are apt to work only for the chosen few whom they attracted from the first, and disdainfully to accentuate the oddities which repel the crowd.

We took a long walk together through the lanes of the vicinity and over the estate of a neighbouring baronet, to which my host had been granted access, and talked of a multitude of things. He spoke of having been recently engaged on translating certain passages of Homer into English verse, though which passages I have forgotten. Apropos of some subject spoken of between us he told me of the existence in manuscript of a novel entitled "The Journalist," which, for reasons he did not confide to me, would not be published until after his decease. He spoke in high terms of the French literature of the day, with its fearless spirit of inquiry and discussion, and its tonic, healthy outspokenness, as contrasted with the prevailing English pusillanimity. In wit, the French were incomparable, and he claimed for them also a high place as humorists. As a general literary vehicle he preferred English to any other language. The talk fell on Tennyson, and I found, to my surprise, that he had never come across the then Laureate's ringing lines, "The third of February, 1853." I quoted a line or two, and he asked, "Do you know the rest?" On my replying "Yes," he said "Give

me that, sir, give me that," and I recited the entire poem, he standing with his feet wide apart, his hands on the crook of his stick, his eyes regarding the sky under contracted, beetling brows, and his mouth slightly ajar. I felt rather nervous and slightly ridiculous standing spouting there, but he seemed quite unconscious of anything humorous in the situation. "That is great, great!" he said emphatically, when I had finished. He expressed a high opinion of Tennyson as a verbal artist, and cited several passages, among them that from "The Daisy," descriptive of the distant Alps as viewed from the summit of Milan Cathedral:—

> "How faintly-flushed, how phantom-fair,
> Was Monte Rosa, hanging there—
> A thousand shadowy-pencill'd valleys
> And snowy dells in a golden air."

I said that it was very beautiful. "It is *too* beautiful," he replied, though what he meant by that he did not explain.

We returned to the house, to find other guests awaiting him. Among them was the late Leslie Stephen, who, I have heard it said, was the original of Vernon Whitford, of "The Egoist." It might well have been so, for "Phœbus Apollo turned fasting-friar" is a phrase of photographic accuracy, a living word-picture of Stephen as I saw him that day. He stayed only for a brief while, to my regret, for he was a man for whose scholarship, intellect, and fearless honesty I had a strong admiration, and I would fain have seen more of him. Years after, a few months before his death, I had a brief correspondence with him, but that day

at Box Hill was the only time we met. There were several young people also, who appeared to be familiars of the house. The host seemed to be as young at heart as any one among them, and was obviously a huge favourite. Somebody mentioned the Elephant and Castle, and a young lady new to London asked what that might be. Mr. Meredith immediately dashed into the recital of a legend, obviously the creation of the moment, concerning an elephant, a castle, and an oriental prince, of which I have quite forgotten the details, but which struck me at the moment as a quite wonderful bit of improvisation. At dinner also his powers in that direction came out. One of the guests would drink nothing but mineral water, and Mr. Meredith warned him against that habit with an intense, and even tragic, solemnity, illustrating its dangers by an horrific story about a fellow-collegian at Dusseldorf —"when I was studying medicine there"—who had fallen a victim to an unbridled thirst for that class of beverage. The unfortunate youth had died suddenly and in inexpressible agony, leaving behind him a solemn request that the autopsy should be performed by his friend, George Meredith. "When I made the first incision," said the narrator, suiting the action to the word with a horrible pantomimic gusto on the joint of mutton he was carving, "the glitter of the stalactites in the poor fellow's gastric cavity positively blinded me—I had to wear blue glasses for months after."

Among the other celebrities with whom I foregathered as an envoy of the *Herald* was the once

notorious and now well-nigh forgotten political adventurer, General Boulanger, with whom I had a brief interview at the house in Portland Place which he tenanted during his English exile. Ten minutes is but a short space in which to read any man's character, but what I saw of le brav' Général did not very greatly impress me. Unless I am vastly mistaken in my estimate of him he was a mass of vanity, and vanity of a curiously puerile sort; and I left him wondering how such a person could ever, even for a moment, have imperilled the peace of a great country, and possibly of all Europe. He was a decidedly handsome man, with an air, when in repose, of strength and dignity which quite evaporated in the least excitement, and his laugh was indescribably fatuous. I cannot believe that he was ever anything more than the stalking-horse of the little clique of "spoof" politicians of whom Henri Rochefort was at once the leader and the type; fishermen in troubled waters, with no real programme except to keep things generally lively, and no real convictions save of their own amazing cleverness and the infinite gullibility of the rest of mankind. His suicide in Brussels was the final *clou* of a rather silly melodrama, and by the time that the famous "March" had been superseded on the street-organs by some other blatant bit of musical vulgarity he was practically forgotten.

But perhaps the most memorable of the many personalities whose fleeting acquaintance I made at this epoch was that of a certain magnate of the University of Oxford. He was the only specimen of his species I have ever encountered or even to

my knowledge beheld, and he ranks in my memory as the most astounding human product in my experience. He was a don of one of the oldest and wealthiest colleges, a man somewhere well on the sunny side of sixty. He had obviously been an athlete in his youth, and he was as hard and clean from head to foot as a new steel nail. He had a grand head, clear-cut as a cameo, and an eye like a stag's. He wore the clerical uniform, which fitted him as though he had been melted and poured into it, and his choker and cuffs glowed with a silver purity. He is probably a bishop by now, and if he would 'vert, I feel certain that the Sacred College would make him immortal as the second English Pope. I spoke with this splendid phenomenon for full five minutes, and the interview was, as Zola says of the moment when Renée Saccard made her obeisance before the Emperor, *la note aiguë dans la mélodie monotone de ma vie.* I shall remember that interview while I remember anything. I suppose he was a scholar—very certainly he was a gentleman, for only a gentleman could have been so extremely offensive with so little offence. I don't suppose he would have questioned that I was a vertebrate animal: he might even have admitted that I was a man, and, if not quite a brother, yet in some distant degree a sort of poor relation. Can you fancy the proudest planter of Old Virginia holding condescending communication with a manumitted nigger? Can you imagine the Imperial Majesty of Germany giving affable audience to the smallest drummer-boy in the Imperial Army? It was like that. Every hair of his head, every

wrinkle of his clothing, every tone of his voice, said audibly, "You are no doubt a very good sort of person in your way and place, but you are not *Oxford*, and I have no sort of use for you." So long as memory holds her seat I shall remember that splendid, that serene, that sumptuous Snob.

That don has come to typify Oxford in my mind. He was physically beautiful, as Oxford is. He was venerable, learned, splendid, as Oxford is. He stood upon the accumulated legacy of centuries of venerability, of learning, of splendour, as Oxford does. But also, like Oxford, and like everything else in this mixed world of ours, he had the defects of his qualities. His venerability was the accident of age, his learning was obsolete, his splendour was based on a quite exaggerated and erroneous estimate of his personal importance—all of which is true of Oxford. He was a great man and a law-giver among schoolboys, but I could but wonder how he would have shown in adult society not of his own set. I found him wandering in my fancy through a hundred scenes with which he was ludicrously incongruous. How would he shape, I wondered, in a newspaper office at 12 p.m. with "a column and a turn" to knock out in three-quarters of an hour on some unexpected development of the fiscal problem, or the outbreak of an epidemic of smallpox in Bethnal Green? What would be the value of his opinion on the chances of this year's Derby; how would he show in Tattersall's ring? What would he have had to say for himself in the smoking-room of the House of Commons, or of an ordinary middle-class club,

where doctors, lawyers, merchants, stock-brokers, and scientists were discussing the questions of the day? Could he lay a row of bricks, plough a furrow, handle a spade, work a lathe, or perform a surgical operation? Could he do anything, or teach anybody else to do anything, except to quote Greek, turn out mathematical formulæ, or to be an upright, honourable, wrong-headed, and generally ornamental and useless encumbrance?

As I have confessed, my failure in journalism was principally, if not entirely, my own fault. All the same, my journalistic luck has been by no means of the best. I have already given one sample. Here is another, dating some seven-and-twenty years back. I was chronically hard up in those days, and at this particular period I had struck the very bed-rock of poverty. I was sleeping on the Thames Embankment, and living on God knows what—I don't remember, at this time of day, how I held body and soul together. But I remember one particular meal, and how it was obtained. There was a certain baker's shop in Tottenham Court Road, with a window of which the lower sash was capable of being raised to permit the obtrusion a little way into the street of a sort of broad wooden tray, supported at its outer extremity by iron uprights resting on the pavement. On this, bread and cakes were exposed for sale. One morning—I had eaten nothing for four days, and had had nothing between my teeth during the whole of that time but water from a street fountain—I stood still to sniff up the scent of the

new-baked loaves, hot from the oven. There was nobody in the shop but the baker, whose back was turned. A rapid glance right and left assured me that nobody was near at hand. I walked quickly past the shop, and with the dexterity of a practised conjuror transferred a small loaf of brown bread to my jacket pocket. In another half minute I had doubled the corner of Howland Street and was tearing at my prize with the horrible avidity of a famished dog, with tears of rage and shame and pure animal ecstasy pouring down my cheeks. "*Ah, Dieu, qu'il est bon et triste de manger quand on crève!*"

On the afternoon of that same day, wandering along the Strand, I met an acquaintance, one "Jimmy" Adair, a brother journalist, of considerably greater age and experience than my own, who had also had his troubles. Jimmy had been editor of a paper in Demerara for some years, and being a thrifty soul, had managed to amass a goodly sum of money, some six or seven hundred pounds. Leaving the place for England, he had invested his savings in rum, and had embarked Cæsar and his fortunes—himself and his rum—on the same ship. In mid-ocean the ship caught fire, and Jimmy, from the retreat of an open boat, had seen her burn to the water's edge, a grand pyrotechnic exhibition, to the glories of which his rum—poor boy!—had nobly contributed. It had been a sore experience, but he took it with a certain stolid gaiety, and faced the world anew, penniless, but cheerful. It is many a long year since I have seen him, but, if he be still "on live," I hereby send my love to him.

Jimmy had news for me. Had I heard of the new weekly paper, the *People*, which was to start next Saturday? I had not. Well, the *People* was a fact, or on the point of becoming so, and, moreover, Jimmy was appointed sub-editor. The editor was Sebastian Evans. He and I were both Birmingham men, he knew my brother, Jimmy would introduce me to him, why not try my luck with him? I was only too glad to try my luck, and Jimmy and I went together to the office—the identical office which, when the *People* moved later to another address, served as headquarters to the London edition of the *New York Herald*. Sebastian Evans received me kindly, and promised immediate perusal of any contribution I might offer. I went to Adair's room and there wrote at hot speed an article entitled "The Hotel of the Beautiful Star," descriptive of my last week s nocturnal experiences on the Embankment. Taking my courage in both hands, I knocked at the door of Evans's room. He was obviously surprised to see me again so soon, but on my presenting my manuscript, said simply, "Sit down, please." He read the article, tossed it into a pigeon-hole, and scribbled a line on a sheet of paper. "If the cashier shouldn't be there, I'll cash it myself," he said. The cashier was there, as it happened, and handed me two sovereigns and two shillings. Jimmy and I went over to the Gaiety bar together—the old Gaiety bar, another lost landmark—and I ate my first real meal for a good fortnight. And that evening I made a special pilgrimage to Tottenham Court Road, and dropped a sixpence on to the baker's tray.

For some little time thereafter—as long as he held the editorship—Evans accepted an article every week from me, and I was in clover. Then he left the paper, and a new man came, bringing his tail with him, as new editors have a knack of doing. A king arose who knew not Joseph, and once again hard times resumed their broken sway.

Sebastian Evans was a very remarkable man, and would have been universally so regarded, had he chosen to exercise any one of his innumerable talents to the neglect of the rest. He was a doctor both of medicine and law; he was a brilliant journalist, a first-class linguist, and a most able barrister. His reason for taking to the bar was characteristic. He had somehow become inspired with a deadly hatred of a certain well-known pleader, and determined, in his own phrase, to "have a smack at him." To that end, he qualified as a barrister, and let it be known that, whatever might be the merits of the cause, and for any fee or none at all, he would be ready to fight any case in which the object of his detestation held the opposing brief. For a session or two he neglected all his other multifarious pursuits for the one dear delight of badgering his enemy, and, I am sure, got plenty of amusement out of his freak. He painted sufficiently well to be exhibited by the R.A., and he wrote one or two volumes of really fine verse—"Brother Fabian's Manuscript," and "In the Studio." He gave me a copy of the latter volume, which I have most unfortunately lost, but I remember a few lines which seem to me to show merit

high above that of most minor poetry. There was a poem called "The King to Be," which opened—

> "Weary with watching and worn with fight
> The King to Be sat alone with the night,
> For foes were many and friends were few,
> And the friends were false, but the foes were true."

There was a phrase descriptive of the walls of the Heavenly City as beheld afar off in a vision, "like wine smitten to stone," which struck me as very fine. And there was a lilting bit of verse satirising the slapdash school of impressionist painting, of which I can remember only the following eight lines :—

> "True, the rudest of strokes shews you clearly
> The painter who can from who can't,
> But to-day 'tis the artist not merely
> Who can, but who does, that we want.
> * * * * *
> "Not the trick of the trowel and plaster,
> To shew that your handling is free,
> But the trick of the genuine master—
> The trick that no mortal can see."

Evans was, besides, a monument of learning, the sort of man to whom one appealed as to an encyclopædia, with a placid certainty of getting the information one needed. I asked him once why he had never taken a line and stuck to it. "Because I'm a damned old fool, my boy," he answered. "But," he added, "I'm the happiest old fool in Europe, and my one regret is that I can't have my time over again." The last I heard of him was that, at an age when most men would have been nailed to an armchair in the chimney-corner, he had taken

to agriculture, and was learning to plough on his own farm.

I have had a rather extensive acquaintance with that curious development of modernity, the Amateur Journalist. The amateur is a fearsome person, whatever be the particular art or science in which he may elect to exhibit his incompetence, but if there is any pursuit in which his native cussedness shows to more advantage than in any other, it is in his conduct of a newspaper. By the very nature of things, the amateur journalist is almost invariably both the proprietor and editor of the sheet in which he is interested. In point merely of literary intelligence and culture I have known specimens of the class superior to all but the very best of their professional congeners, but those gifts are of quite subsidiary importance in the editorial chair. Worthily or profitably to fill that seat demands qualities of mind and a general experience of life which no amateur can hope to possess, for the simple reason that if he possessed them he would not want to be an amateur in any line, and least of all in journalism. A dilettante commanding a fleet in action or an army in the field would be hardly a more hopeless futility than one of the same kidney in a position of authority in a newspaper office. In the first place, no paper run by an amateur can hope to possess a competent staff, and this for a double reason. The amateur editor does not want a competent staff. That would mean being snubbed and taught his business by his subordinates, and he naturally prefers to suck the sweets of the editorial

position by dispensing patronage among other amateurs. On the other hand, competent journalists will not enlist under an amateur editor, who would rile every nerve in their bodies all day long by his complacent exhibition of ignorance of things the very office-boy takes for granted. The one person among such a crowd who may be generally relied upon to know his business is the cashier, who may or may not be an honest man to start with, but who, if he remains honest after six months' experience of the constant temptations to fraud put in his way by his employer's childish ignorance of business, is nothing less than a commercial hero.

To attempt to catalogue the points at which the amateur differs from the professional editor would be a tedious business. His most exasperating peculiarity, in my experience of him, is his utter lack of human sympathy with the people whose living depends on him. That may seem a harsh statement, but it can be justified by simply rehearsing the fashion in which I have been treated by the three specimens of the breed I have had dealings with.

In the first case I was acting as the sub-editor of a weekly "society" journal, started and edited by a young gentleman who had until recently held a commission in a cavalry regiment. I used some of the experiences gathered in his office as part of those happening to George Murdoch as sub-editor of *Wisdom*, in "A Song of Sixpence." On one occasion he absented himself from the office for an entire month without giving a hint of his whereabouts, and without leaving anything more than the

petty cash in the business-manager's desk to defray the contributors' salaries and the printer's bill. I managed, by infinite labour and diplomacy, to keep the paper alive during his absence. When at last he lounged back into the office I spoke with considerable heat regarding his conduct. He listened with a face of blank amazement. "What did it matter?" he asked. Here he was, ready to pay everybody. I told him that what it mattered to me was that everything I had in the world except the clothes I stood in was in pawn, and that for the past three days I had not had a square meal. Then a light broke in upon him. "Do you mean to say," he said, "that you *live* on what I pay you? And all the other Johnnies, too?" I told him that, incredible as it must seem, such was indeed the case. The statement interested him for the moment, but can hardly be said permanently to have enlarged his ideas. A month or so later he casually intimated to me that my services would not be required after the end of the coming week. The reason given was that at lunch that day he had met one Jones—"an awfully nice chap, most disgustingly hard up—old school-fellow of mine, don't you know"—and had promised him my berth. I pointed out that *I* was an awfully nice chap, that I had fulfilled the duties of my position to the best of my ability and, so far as I knew, to his complete satisfaction, and that to fire me out at a week's notice would make me as disgustingly hard up as Jones actually was. "But I've *promised* Jones," said my editor. "Don't you see, old chap, what an awkward position you're placing me in?" I

intimated that the position was of his own making, and further that I was legally entitled either to three months' notice or to my full salary for that period. He expressed himself, at great length and with considerable force of language, as at once surprised and wounded at my base commercialism, and ended up by magnificently referring me to his solicitor. I began an action, but had no funds to carry it on, and so permitted it to lapse. This person was not a brute. He was not even, intellectually speaking, a fool. He was simply an Amateur Editor.

My second experience of that kind of person occurred several years later. This gentleman was not the proprietor of the sheet whose destinies he directed. It had been started and originally edited by Mr. T. P. O'Connor, and was in his day known to an extensive public as the *Weekly Sun.* By him it was sold to a capitalist of vast wealth, who, no doubt for his own good reasons, bestowed the editorship upon a connection of his, who may be here referred to by the title by which he was known in the office, "the Doctor." Under his auspices the paper fell rapidly into obscurity as the *Sunday Sun.* Its first page was occupied by an article entitled "The Book of the Week," and to that page I was for three or four years a fairly frequent contributor. I do not suppose that my criticisms had any great influence on the public mind, if for no other reason than that the circulation of the journal was so small as to make it rather wonderful that even the wealthiest of multi-millionaires should have thought it worth while to

keep it afloat. But they attracted the attention of the editors of other papers, and I was on my way to establish a good market for my critical wares when Nemesis, wearing on this occasion the physical semblance of the Doctor, asserted her influence. The Doctor, besides editing the *Sunday Sun*, was the managing director of *Black and White*. After paying me many merely verbal compliments on the excellence of my work, he proceeded to the practical compliment of suggesting that I should enter into a six-months' contract to contribute no critical work, over my own name, to any but the two journals under his control, and that for that term I should be the only literary critic employed on either of those journals. I accepted the contract, and promptly on the day on which the six months expired I was informed that my services were no longer needed on *Black and White*, and that on the *Sunday Sun* I reverted to my original position of an occasional contributor. No pretence of an explanation of this arbitrary proceeding was vouchsafed. My place on the journals I had deserted in order to accept the Doctor's contract had been of course filled up, and the engagement I had looked upon as a really brilliant chance was converted into my temporary ruin.

My third experience in this sort happened within the last two years. A weekly paper was started by a lady—a very great lady indeed, of quasi-royal rank. In this case I had no contract or engagement, but acted merely from week to week as literary and dramatic critic. Presently, owing to complications I never understood, and

with which I had no personal concern, financial difficulties arose. Loyalty to my employers has always been a point of pride with me, and I stuck to my work at no small inconvenience until my account against the paper reached the—to me—considerable sum of forty pounds. My loyalty in this instance was recompensed by a cheque for the amount due to me, accompanied by an intimation that my services were no longer needed. A kindly caprice of circumstance has of late set me beyond the necessity of working merely for the daily crust. But, should Fate again prove unkind, I shall need the daily crust very bitterly indeed before I seek it at the hands of the Amateur Journalist.

During, and for some time after, the period of my engagement with the first of this eccentric trio, I was living in Staple Inn, to me a place of many memories. My rooms were at the top of Number Four, next door to the Hall, and as that was the building in which Samuel Johnson is said to have lived while writing "Rasselas," I pleased myself by the fancy that mine were the actual chambers he had occupied. My sojourn there was signalised by one curious experience. A group of my acquaintances, who lived in the neighbourhood, used to meet in the inner bar of a quiet little public-house at the corner of Chancery Lane, which occupied part of the site now covered by one of Pownceby's wine-shops. Among them was a young man named Swan, a quiet, studious fellow, at that time engaged on the composition of an Arab-English Dictionary. Returning one

night from a week's stay in the country, I found Swan at the accustomed haunt, dressed in deep black, and plunged in a state of melancholy in painful contrast with his usual placid cheerfulness. Inquiry elicited that he had that day attended the funeral of his oldest and closest friend, who had been his school and college-chum, and for over ten years his house-mate in London. "I can't tell you," he said, "how I loathe going home to-night, and the prospect of waking in the morning to see poor old Tom's empty bed in the opposite corner of the room. I can't do it—I won't." In sympathy with his desolation I volunteered to go with him that night, and occupy the vacant bed. He was almost ludicrously grateful at the mere offer of this small service. In the morning, after breakfasting with him, I went to the Inn for a shave and a clean shirt. On entering my bed-room my heart fairly stood still for a moment. In the roof was a huge jagged hole, and on the pillow beneath it, exactly on the spot my head would have occupied had I been sleeping there, lay an oblong mass of stone, weighing at least thirty pounds—the coping-stone of a chimney then in process of repair.

On the inner sides of the index and middle finger of the hand with which I am writing are two small, scarcely perceptible, circular scars, recalling to my mind certain events which may find record here. Their connection with the first of these events will not be immediately apparent to the reader, but he will see the nexus presently. I

lived for a brief period in a certain set of flats, the topography of which does not matter. My modest wants were attended to by a girl of about seventeen, a pretty, delicate little creature, with an air of gentleness and of natural refinement not common among women of her class, to whom I took a strong liking. Without being absolutely mentally deficient, she had a curious bluntness of perception, and a quite wonderful ingenuity in the perpetration of small blunders. I have known her to bring in my boots of a morning, one beautifully polished, the other encrusted with yesterday's mud. To send her on the simplest errand was to court disaster; and she never by any chance correctly reported a verbal message. These little lapses were more than atoned for by a positively pathetic eagerness to be of use. I never met any other creature so perfectly describable by the housewife's epithet, "willing," and it was no more possible to be angry or severe with her than with a bird or a kitten. That anything in the normal semblance of a man should have wrought harm to so harmless a creature is one of the most shocking facts I have encountered on my way through life, but a fact it was. The natural result of bowelless brutality on the one side and of mere ignorant weakness on the other was that the poor child bore a baby. It was born in an empty set of rooms in the Mansions, and its dead body was discovered in the fireplace there a few hours later. There was no doubt of its maternity. In the quite hopeless hope of being of some use to the poor girl, I attended the coroner's inquest. I had some slight acquaintance with the doctor

who had performed the autopsy. He was a red-haired, dour-faced Corkagian, with an accent as broad as the Irish Channel. To my huge relief, he swore positively that the infant had been still-born. We left the Court together, and he told me, in the calmest fashion in the world, that he had perjured himself—the child had lived at least an hour, and had died by suffocation. In answer to a not unnatural remark of mine on the recklessness of this confession to one of whom he knew so little he replied, "'Tis not *you* that would betray me, I'm thinking. I saw your face while I was givin' me evidence, and if ye'd come into a fortune ye couldn't have looked happier. And if 'tis perjury to save that poor little fool from prison—or maybe from the gallows—by Jasus, I ask nothing betther than to perjure meself every day I have to live."

Some ten or eleven years later than the date of this little story I met this same Irish doctor, of whom I had in the interim entirely lost sight. He had gone down in the world from a combination of causes, and was engaged as manager of one of several chemists' shops run by a firm in the East End. Since my twentieth year I have suffered at odd and quite unaccountable intervals from the malady—far more distressing than either actively painful or really dangerous—of insomnia. It is a peculiarity of my constitution that I am curiously insensible to the influence of soporifics, and can take with impunity doses of opium and its kindred drugs which would kill most people. I was at this moment attacked by the most obstinate fit of

sleeplessness I have ever experienced, and the day on which I stumbled against my old acquaintance was the ninth in succession during which I had not known one minute of complete unconsciousness, although I had been swallowing sulphonal and such-like medical sweetmeats by the handful. I told him of my condition, and begged him to give me something—anything—which would make me sleep. He took me to his shop, and there filled for me a phial of a salt of morphia—sixty grains weight, as a provision in hand against subsequent similar attacks. He gave me a scale of doses, of which I took a pencilled note. I went home, went to bed, and took a dose, which had absolutely no effect. I took another, and a third, with a similar result. The last post arrived, bringing a letter which informed me that a business project which I had regarded, with perfectly good reason, as a certainty, had fallen through. My torn nerves and battered brain gave way under this added stress. I do not think—though I am by no means sure—that I had any deliberate intention of suicide, but I certainly meant to sleep, and whether I ever woke again or not was a quite secondary consideration. I flung all that was left of the drug—not much short of the original sixty grains—into a tankard of beer, drained it, and returned to bed. I have no memory of lighting a cigarette, but when, after many hours of blank unconsciousness, I awoke, I found the stump of one crushed between my first and second fingers, each of which had a hole in it exposing the charred surface of the bone. Eight-and-forty hours of paralysis —I can find no other word to express so complete

a loss of muscular power—and of indescribable nausea and headache were, in my case, the only results of a dose of poison sufficient to kill thirty people of normal constitution.

It was while "A Song of Sixpence," was going its rounds among the publishers that I had my only first-hand experience of life in a London hospital. I was suffering from a local growth which, though not in the least dangerous nor at all painful, it was judged necessary to excise, and my friend Oliver MacKellar offered me the use of a private room in St. Thomas's. That I declined in favour of a bed in one of the common wards, which I rightly anticipated would yield experiences valuable both in themselves and as "copy." The Sister to whose care I was relegated afterwards confessed that she had been strongly opposed to this arrangement, as "gentleman" patients are not popular in hospital, but she owned that her fears had been vain, and that I had submitted as perfectly to the necessary discipline as any other of the inhabitants of the ward. It is an experience which I remember as a whole with sincere pleasure. The one thing I disliked in the entire business was the taking of an anæsthetic, but on that MacKellar insisted, and I of course gave way. When the time for the operation arrived I was taken into the bath-room of the ward, stretched prone upon a table, and my mouth covered by an elastic mouthpiece communicating with the vessel containing the ether. I have never been more intensely awake in my life than I was at that moment, and was backing

all my will-force and my cultivated power of observation against the action of the drug. I can remember my sensations up to the moment at which I lost consciousness with perfect clearness. I lay fronting a large, uncurtained window, looking on the roofs of some houses topped by a brilliantly clear sky. Quite suddenly, that part of the prospect was smitten from my view as completely as if a curtain had been drawn before it. I could see nothing more distant than the ring of quiet, attentive faces, MacKellar's among them, which were regarding me. Then they vanished, and my vision was bounded by the white, muscular, heavily-veined hands of the anæsthetist, which held the apparatus to my mouth. They vanished also, and I was flying at incalculable speed through limitless space of Egyptian blackness, pepper-castered with spots and blotches and constellations of intense fire which somehow gave no light. My mind was filled with wonder at this paradox, wonder which gave way to a bewildering exhilaration in the swiftness at which I was being shot to some unknown goal—something akin, I fancy, to the "speed-madness" to which the weak-nerved motorist is liable. Then, the whole universe seemed to blaze into sudden, all-enveloping flame—such a coruscation, I should imagine, as lights the brain traversed and shattered by a bullet; and then, an insensibility than which death itself can know none more complete.

Slowly, like a diver rising from some vast depth of turbid water, I floated back to consciousness. I was lying in bed, with a woman's face bending over me, and yet at the same time I was

in the old Independent chapel at home, and the congregation was singing "Abide with Me" to the strains of the organ. The voices I heard were those of the nurses and my fellow-patients, for it was now eight o'clock in the evening, and at that hour it is customary in each ward to sing a hymn, after which silence is proclaimed for the night, and the guests of the good St. Thomas address themselves to sleep.

I awoke early next morning, and watched the strengthening sun-rays chase the mist which hung above the river, and listened to the chimes of Big Ben until he proclaimed the hour of six. At the first stroke the silence of the ward was broken by a clamour of cheery voices. "Wot ho, Twenty, how's the leg, old man?" "Look 'ere, Seventeen, if you snore agin like you snored last night I'm blowed if I don't come and sit on your 'ed!" "Oh, stow it, ye bloomin' old grumbler. Always asnipin' at somebody, you are. Puffick disgrice to the ward, ain't he, Sister?" and so on. I have an idea that the lover of his kind who would see cockney human nature at its best should seek and study it in the wards of one of the great hospitals. A resolute cheerfulness, an obstinate determination to make the best of the worst circumstances, a cheery defiance of pain and of every other kind of trouble, a lively sympathy for and interest in each others' ailments, and a sincere gratitude for the care and skill and tenderness so lavishly bestowed on the sufferers, are the dominant notes of such a place.

During my fourteen days' stay in St. Thomas's

I got on terms of intimacy with more than one of my fellow-patients. One queer character was an old peasant, a tough octogenarian who had passed over sixty years in London without in the least impairing the raciness of the dialect and accent he had learned in his native village as a boy. He suffered from some cancerous growth in the bone of the lower jaw, and had already undergone eleven operations, at each of which a bit of bone of the thickness of a sixpence had been removed. He was inordinately proud of this unique record, and determined to improve on it. "The doctor," he told me, "wants I to ha' my jar tuk out, an' have a pewter jar put in i'stead, but I doant hold wi' anny such blasphemious proceedin'. The Lard give I my jar when He med I, and I'm agoin' t' eat my vittles wi' un arl the days as I'm let to live." Another patient, the darling of the Sister, the nurses, and the entire ward, was a little boy of about five years old, one of the most beautiful creatures it has ever been my fortune to behold. He had been born and bred in a slum scarce a stone's throw from the hospital, and bore a common English name; but he could hardly have been of unmixed English ancestry. His complexion was a dark olive lit in the cheeks with a fine orange glow; his immense eyes, of a wonderful depth and brilliance, were black as midnight; and he had a mass of waving curls as fine and soft as the finest silk—a beauty curiously touched, young as he was, by that incommunicable air of knowingness and furtive, shabby smartness natural to the child-cockney—a Velasquez with a dash of Phil May.

On the first day of my convalescence I went and sat on his bed, and entered into conversation with him. "What is the matter with you, my little man?" I asked. "My figh's broke," he answered. "That's bad," I said. "How did you manage to do that?" "Didn't do it. It was faver." "Father! Why, how did *he* do it?" "Wiv a poker." "And where is your father?" "In pizon." "And where's your mother?" "Dono. Can you play cat's cradle?" I did not possess that accomplishment, and he was good enough to teach me, and was extremely impatient at my clumsiness and stupidity. I spoke of him to the Sister, asking if, on his recovery, he would be re-consigned to the mercies of the brute who had lamed him, and was glad to hear that another home, in which he would be kindly treated and well taught, had been found for him, with the full consent of his father, who, being approached on the subject, had said that "they might roast the little —— in hell for all that he cared." During my time in the place more than one child-patient recovered, and was sent howling with grief out of the hospital, and back to the sordid cellar or squalid garret they had known as "home," accompanied by the sorrowing pity of every soul in the place; to exchange the paradise of cleanliness, tenderness, loving care, good food, sweatmeats, toys, all that children love, for the inferno of the London slums. I have seen nothing more heartbreaking than those farewells, nothing more touching than the kisses and endearments by which the nurses strove to soften for those desolate little waifs the pang of parting.

I learned in St. Thomas's a sad little history, which was yet not without a sort of melancholy charm. One of the patients was an old gentleman —I use the word advisedly, for I have seldom met a man of finer breeding—who was slowly convalescing after a severe operation. He was allowed to rise for an hour or two every day, and during that time made himself extremely useful in a quiet fashion, doing little services for anybody in need of them. He was visited by his wife, as obviously a gentlewoman as he a gentleman, and I noticed that they both showed much familiarity with and a great affection for one of the nurses in the ward. She was a grave, quiet-looking woman of early middle-age, and, like so many other women of her profession nowadays, patently a lady. She bore a name uncommon in itself, and occupying an honoured place in English history as that of a great naval commander. The night before I left the hospital the old gentleman and myself were enjoying a pipe in each other's society on the broad stone balcony at the end of the ward, overlooking the river, and he told me the story of which I have spoken. Nurse D. was the great-granddaughter of the heroic sailor whose name she bore. The teller of the story had, thirty years earlier, owned the estate contiguous to that of her father, then, as he himself had been, a wealthy man. Both families had been ruined, and he, an old and well-nigh penniless man, had found his way into the hospital in which his old friend's daughter, whom he had known in her cradle, and had danced on his knee a hundred times, was acting as a nurse.

The publication of "A Song of Sixpence" brought me some little consideration. It was well noticed, and that circumstance, no doubt, helped me to get rid of a certain number of short stories at what were at that time, and for a writer so little known, fairly good prices. The tremendous boom in that sort of fiction, which came with the huge popularity of Sir Conan Doyle and Mr. Rudyard Kipling, was then still, as a leader-writer of a certain great London daily once beautifully said, "in the uncut leaves of the womb of fate," and even the most popular authors did not make much by it. I conceived the theme of another novel, "A Man of Genius," and worked at it ardently, until I received from the late Henry Herman, the part-author of "The Silver King" and "Claudian," an offer of more immediately remunerative labour.

Herman was a personality worth dwelling upon for more than a mere moment. He was a genius *manqué*, a spoiled great man, a sort of crippled giant. Perhaps his most serious drawback was that he had no language to think in. He spoke English, French, German, and Italian with pretty equal fluency, and all with the same quaint Alsatian accent, but he had no literary implement of which he was complete master. In my experience, polyglots are always more or less puzzle-headed people, and Herman's ideas, always grandiose and sometimes genuinely poetic, were apt to be somewhat formless and inchoate. Cognate with these qualities was a wild restlessness of temperament which kept him from settling to any definite line of effort. His mind was a sort of splendid rag-bag, full of

"purple patches," a mental dust-heap which would well have repaid the labour of sifting and arranging. He had had a vast and various experience of life. He was by profession a doctor of medicine. He had been a sailor before the mast, a ship's purser, a steel engraver, a schoolmaster, a journalist, a hunter and trapper, a gold-miner in California, and a silver-miner in Colorado. He had fought for the South in the American civil war, and had come unscathed through nine pitched battles and four forlorn hopes. He had lost an eye, it was generally believed in action, but the fact was really otherwise. A fragment of a Northern shell had inflicted a mere scratch upon the lower eyelid, which, for lack of proper attention, festered and gathered in a painful fashion. When at last Herman was able to find the regimental surgeon, the latter, who had been sawing off arms and legs and performing kindred operations for nearly forty-eight hours on end, was so drunk with fatigue and sleeplessness, that, in an attempt to lance the gathering, he thrust his instrument into the pupil, and so utterly destroyed the sight of the eye. After this accident Herman's life became less adventurous, while still remaining strangely haphazard and unsettled. For him to succeed in any one of the innumerable professions to which he turned his hand seemed enough to disgust him with it, and to send him off in search of some other means of making a livelihood.

He had been at one period a sworn chemical expert of one of the Paris law-courts, and *à propos* of that experience used to tell one of the best of his inexhaustible store of good stories. He was

called as witness regarding the quality of a certain brand of wine. Having chemically tested the liquor, he went into the box and swore positively that it did not contain, among its many constituents, one solitary drop of grape-juice. The wine-merchant was, in consequence, heavily fined. On leaving the Court, Herman found the merchant waiting for him. He anticipated strife, or at least objurgation, but the merchant was perfectly civil, and invited him to a glass at a neighbouring café. At the moment of parting, after a long and friendly conversation, the merchant asked, with an admirably casual air, "By the way, how was it that you were able to swear so positively that there was no grape-juice in that stuff of mine?" "Because," replied Herman, "if there had been, in combination with the other elements you used, it would have caused the formation of tartaric acid on the barrel." "Thank you very much," replied the honest merchant. "*You'll find some next time.*"

Herman, myself, and John Cobbe—also, alas! among the departed—once found ourselves together in the city of York. We took a walk one day, and stopped for luncheon at an hotel in the neighbourhood of the racecourse. It was race week, but owing to the singular inclemency of the weather the meeting had been a comparative failure in the way of attendance. The larder of the hotel was, in consequence, greatly overstocked. The three of us sat down to a table loaded with a mass of provisions which would have satiated the appetites of a regiment of Horse Guards—a Gargantuan mound of beef, a huge ham, and a turkey, a giant of his

tribe, which would have turned the scale at thirty pounds. We elected for the turkey. We were all reasonably good trenchermen, and all fairly sharp-set, but when we had done our best the great bird looked as if a few mice had been nibbling at him. At this moment a big, gaunt-looking mastiff strolled in through the open French window leading to the garden, and dumbly appealed to us for alms. Herman, in one of the moments of comic madness to which he was liable, gave the brute the entire turkey. Probably fearing that the gift might be withdrawn, he bolted with it down the garden path, and leaped the fence into a neighbouring field. "That's very funny, no doubt," remarked Cobbe, who was a man of business, "but we shall have to pay for that bird." "Then we'll haf zome vun vor our money," replied Herman. He put the metal cover over the empty porcelain dish, and rang the bell. The waiter entered. "Take that away," said Herman, "and bring some whisky." The waiter, a portly, personable, rather muscular-looking man, bent over the dish, stiffened his back, and lifted—hard. The dish and the cover soared over his head like leaves blown by the wind, the former smashing to fragments against the wall behind him, and the waiter sat suddenly on the floor with a thud which shook the building. Herman and Cobbe, who sat facing him, kept a perfect and unshaken gravity of feature, as if nothing in the least out of the common had happened. I was glad that my face was turned in the opposite direction. The waiter gathered himself up and went away like a man somnambulising, and we saw him no more.

Another man, whose face was as white as a corpse's, and who trembled visibly in vague terror of something sudden and painful happening to him, appeared with the bill, in which the turkey and the breakage figured largely. Herman paid it without a word, and we all three lit our cigars and filed out. Pale faces peered at us from doorways and corners and over the balustrades of stairs, and the population of the neighbourhood was congregated in the street outside. A considerable deputation followed us quite a long distance, loath to lose sight of the three miraculous strangers who had devoured a thirty-pound turkey, bones and beak and all, and I have no doubt that we are the nucleus of a legend in the place to this day.

Many of the experiences which had befallen this modern Ulysses were worthy of permanent record, and it is a great pity that death at the—for a man of his superb physique and indomitable courage—early age of sixty should have deprived the world of the autobiography he had intended to write. Let me rescue one or two events from the complete oblivion which might otherwise fall upon them. On one occasion he was living in a cosmopolitan camp of pioneers, pitched under the shadow of a huge, overhanging mountain-side in the State of Arizona. There were a few animals among the community, a couple of horses, a mule or two, a few mongrel dogs, and one cat. On a certain morning the camp woke up to find itself deserted by its four-footed inhabitants, who were nowhere to be found. Herman convened his companions and addressed them to the effect that this desertion was a grim warning

which might at any moment be horribly fulfilled, and urged them to imitate the behaviour of the quadrupeds and forsake the camp. They laughed at him, and he went forth alone. He had tramped barely five miles, when, with a crash which seemed to shake the solid globe, the mountain-side fell upon the camp and buried it a mile deep.

On another occasion he found himself one of a similar crowd in some other wild district of the then unsettled West. The camp consisted mostly of the poorest and most ignorant class of Irishman, with a sprinkling of Germans, Italians, Mexicans, and Spaniards. One day it was joined by a shambling vagabond in whom dim traces of what he had once been were feebly discernible through layer on layer of failure, drunkenness, and degradation. He claimed to be a graduate of the University of Oxford, and there could be no doubt that he was, or rather had been, a man of real culture and of considerable natural talent. He discovered a bed of asbestos in the neighbourhood, and out of the fibre knitted for himself a pair of socks. Coming in to camp one rainy day, he found a number of his companions loafing round a fire. He took off the socks and flung them on the mass of glowing logs, and, when they were dry, put them on his feet again. If his idea had been to astonish his ignorant and brutal neighbours he certainly succeeded, but hardly to the degree to which they succeeded in astonishing *him*. For within the next ten minutes he was hanging by the neck to a branch of a big tree, "accused—our learning's fate—of wizardry."

Is the markedly optimistic temperament necessarily allied to the superstitious type of mind? I am inclined to answer the question affirmatively, for I have never known a very hopeful person who was not more or less swayed by signs and omens. Herman, whose hopefulness, to one of my somewhat sombre temper, seemed sometimes little short of a happy kind of lunacy, was especially open to such influences. He came down to Nice to collaborate with Christie on a novel. It was the seventh day of the seventh month of the year when he arrived. The carriage in which he had travelled on the P. L. M. had been numbered 777. The open cab which conveyed him to our villa on Montboron bore the number 707, and the number of his various articles of luggage was seven. This rush of coincidences inspired him with the belief that a fortune was awaiting him at Monte Carlo, and he scarcely gave himself time to swallow a biscuit and a glass of wine before he flew thither, accompanied by Christie, who—another optimist *à outrance*—had caught the infection of his enthusiasm. They returned by the early night train—le Train des Décavés—without a five-franc piece between them. They had played for over two hours, and number seven had never once turned up.

By mining and speculation, and by other means, Herman had made several quite respectable little fortunes, but an incurable generosity—he would have given the hat off his head to anybody who had asked for it—and an ingrained contempt of money kept him from retaining any of them. *The Silver King* and *Claudian* were both great successes, and

are to-day yielding good revenues to those who hold their rights, but to him they brought only brief periods of prosperity. At the time at which I am now arrived he was at one of his periods of financial depression. A certain well-known dramatist had recently died, leaving amongst his effects a mass of inchoate dialogue and situation—written probably many years earlier, before he had mastered the practice of his craft—which bore the same relation to a drama that a swamp bears to a canal, or a box of beads to a necklace. It was bought for a few pounds by a speculative manager, and submitted to Herman. The latter was at that time suffering from some sort of trouble with his one remaining eye, and asked me to read the MS. to him. I did so, and we discussed together its dramatic possibilities. We determined that there were possibilities in it, and as a result the manager contracted to pay Herman £300 and myself £50 for our labour in cutting, revising, reconstructing, and generally knocking the piece into an actable condition, and then staging it. It was to be rehearsed for a fortnight, and played for a trial week at a provincial town by a company already on the road.

It was produced during a week of blistering heat—the worst possible conditions for theatrical success. Such audiences as came to see it were exceedingly enthusiastic, but the houses were dismally thin. Our manager had been doing badly for some time past, the week's receipts could have been barely sufficient to pay the company's salaries and their fares to the next town, and when, on the

Friday night, the manager announced to us that he must go up to London to raise the £350 he had promised us, neither Herman nor myself felt very sanguine about seeing the money. The curtain fell on Saturday's performance, scenery and dresses were transported to the railway station, and we saw the company off with cheerful faces, hoping against hope. But when the last train from London had come and gone, and the manager had not put in an appearance, things began to look more than a little haggard. We had a fortnight's unpaid hotel bill to face, and the further question of how to return to London took on disquieting proportions. We sat together in Herman's bedroom, canvassing ways and means, while the bell of a neighbouring church tolled one, two, and three o'clock, when suddenly a step sounded on the landing, and into the room burst the glorious apparition of the manager, waving above his head a handful of bank-paper. He had missed his train from London by a bare minute, and, knowing our necessity, had been almost as perturbed as ourselves. Then, as good luck would have it, a special train had been ordered by some great personage to the identical town he desired to reach, and he had secured a place in the guard's van. I am happy to state that the piece turned out a huge success, is still enjoying a vast provincial vogue, and has set the manager on a pinnacle of fortune worthy so good a fellow.

In spite of this and other interruptions the composition of my new novel went steadily forward, and was finished within five months of its

inception. It was nearing completion when what I at first thought a most encouraging incident occurred. I was introduced to a gentleman who was on the point of starting a cosmopolitan monthly review. He declared himself a fervid admirer of such of my work as he had happened to see, and learning that I was engaged upon a novel, desired to read it so far as it had then progressed. I gave the MS. into his hands, he professed himself hugely delighted with it, and offered to run it through the pages of his review at the rate of ten thousand words per month, and at a payment of £2 per thousand for the serial right. I acquiesced gladly, and dreamed that I had at last found my long-sought Mecaenas. Two numbers of the review appeared, and then, unhappily, it died. I received nothing for the twenty thousand words of my novel which had appeared in its pages, and had considerable difficulty in rescuing the rest of the MS. from the printer, who had not been paid either. The one scrap of satisfaction I got out of the business came in the form of a most generous letter of praise from Hall Caine, who at that time I barely knew, but who, by some weird chance, had happened on a copy of one of the numbers of the review. He remains to this day the only person I know of who ever heard of its existence.

By this time the book was finished, and I entered on the labour of finding a publisher for it. The gods of literature were kinder to me on this occasion than in the kindred case of "A Song of Sixpence," and it was rejected by only

seven firms. It was ultimately published within eighteen months of its completion by a London firm, and I may honestly describe it as a decided success. The Press was enthusiastic, and I have known few more delightful moments than when, a week or so after the book's appearance, I stumbled upon a review of a column and a quarter in the *Standard*, hailing me as a decided acquisition to the ranks of contemporary novelists. The *Times* was almost equally warm, the *Athenæum*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and other leading journals, spoke welcome words of encouragement, and in the columns of the *Westminster Gazette* it was made the peg on which to hang a series of clever and trenchant articles on the then condition of English fiction. Surely, oh surely, my chance had come at last! Alas—

> "Not seldom, clad in radiant hue,
> Deceitfully comes forth the morn."

Shortly after their production of another novel from my pen, written at hot speed to take full advantage of my recent success, the *personnel* of the firm underwent a change, with the result that both books were nearly as completely lost to public knowledge as if they had never been printed at all. Once again, therefore, my Nemesis was left triumphant.

Apart from one or two melodramatic pot-boilers, the plots of which were conveyed from a set of old French plays picked up for a few pence in Holywell Street, and which, bad as they were, brought me in more money than all my other work

in fiction, I made only one more essay at expressing myself in that form. I wrote some five-and-twenty thousand words of a novel of which the provisional title was "A Splendid Fellow." Judging this performance by what I can still remember of it, I am inclined to think it was very much the best thing I ever did. It was intended for an intimate analytical study of a character not unlike that of the principal character in my first novel, to whom circumstances combined to offer the fullest possible play to the utter selfishness and heartless ambition which were the keynotes of his character. Under the cloak of a fascinating exterior and of a facile surface good-nature as genuine as it was shallow, my hero was to have proceeded on a brilliant and unchecked career of conquest, every step in his path to a peerage and the certain prospect of Westminster Abbey marked by some masterpiece of mean and caddish crime. I was in love with my theme, and left the personages of the story growing under my pen in strength and verisimilitude with every passing day. Then, one memorable evening, after a day spent in strenuous and delightful labour on my *magnum opus*, I went out for a walk. Returning, I chanced to raise my eyes to the window of my room, from which, to my horror, a snowstorm of paper was issuing. I tore into the house and upstairs in tme to rescue the last completed sheet of the manuscript of "A Splendid Fellow." The rest was circulating over the adjacent streets on the wings of the wind—the only circulation it will ever know. I accepted the incident as a sort of supernatural, final *negatur* to

my ambition as a writer of fiction, and have never, since that day, attempted another novel.

I may as well, while I am about it, make a clean sweep of the narration of my misfortunes in the merely literary line. In the year 1900, Robert Buchanan—of whom I shall presently have a good deal to say—was smitten with paralysis. His recovery was pronounced to be quite hopeless, and on the strength of my long and intimate connection with him I was commissioned by a young publisher, who had recently started in business, to write a critical study of his life-work. Buchanan lingered for nine months, and then died with almost startling suddenness, and the book was on the market within a week or two of his death. It went well, but, owing to the publisher's retirement from business, it has disappeared from the list of the living as completely as the books I have already mentioned had done aforetime.

A year or two later I made a bargain with Messrs. Isbister to edit a library of books to be called "The Pro and Con Series." Each volume was to have consisted of two essays, written from diametrically opposite points of view by well-known experts on some debatable subject of actual interest, such as the Nationalization of Railways and of the Land, Capital Punishment, Conscription, the Influences of the Turf, Municipal Trading, and the like. I entered on the undertaking with a light heart, recking little of the huge amount of correspondence and the number of personal interviews its performance would entail, almost all of which work was doomed to be wasted. Messrs. Isbister

produced one volume of the projected series, that on "Old Age Pensions," and then went into liquidation. That was five years ago, since when I have, so to speak, confined my efforts to the *hors d'œuvres* of literature. The present volume is an attempt at a dish on something like the old scale, and I am putting in a good deal of time in trying to imagine what new trick the literary Fates may have invented this time for my discomfiture. Up to date, my account with those capricious powers stands as follows:—

The complete MS. of a novel lost in transmission through the post.

A novel rejected by thirty-six publishers and ultimately sold for £10.

Two novels and a Critical Biography the circulation of which ceased on the changes in the firms of their respective publishers.

A projected series of Sociological Studies vetoed by a similar accident.

Twenty-five thousand words of a novel blown through the window.

A book which I cannot persuade any publisher to produce.

The retirement of John Reid from the editorship of the London edition of the *New York Herald* and of Sebastian Evans from the editorship of the *People*, the death of the Review in which the first twenty thousand words of my story had appeared and my adventures with the three Amateur Editors, serve excellently as the trimmings to this feast of failure.

A man talking of himself is as a babbling brook,

and of his wrongs or his misfortunes, as a rushing river. I have not nearly arrived at the end of my tale of professional woe, but I should like to pause here for a few words of personal explanation. I should be sorry if any reader I am fortunate enough to find should take this book as the outpouring of the gall of an atrabilious grumbler. Writing this in the imminent shadow of my fiftieth birthday, and recognising—as I may well do—that my chances of fame and fortune as a writer have vanished as utterly as the snows of yester-year, I am not in the least angry or bitter about it. To say that I have never known moments of anger or of bitterness would be to proclaim myself as something more than human. But I have suffered, and suffer, so little from the continued and inveterate failure of my projects that I am inspired greatly to doubt if the most brilliant success would really have brought me any such overflowing pleasure as I once believed it in its power to give. There may be—there certainly are—natures otherwise, and, as I think, less happily compact in this respect than mine, natures to which success is a ravishing and intoxicating wine, and failure a draught of Marah whose after-taste is only to be scoured from the loathing palate by the tooth of the grave-worm. It is an open question whether, in such a world as this, where Fortune is rarely regularly kind even to her most pampered favourites,

> "Whose even thread the Fates spin round and full
> Out of their choicest and their whitest wool—"

such a temperament can be altogether a blessing.

Kicks are commoner than ha'pence to the luckiest of us, and it is surely well for a man to be able to accept either with a decent indifference. Tennyson never saw my face, but he hit me in the bull's-eye when he penned the lines he puts into the mouth of old Earl Yniol, in "The Marriage of Geraint"—

> "Nor know I whether I be very base
> Or very manful, whether very wise
> Or very foolish; only this I know,
> That whatsoever evil happen to me,
> I seem to suffer nothing, heart or limb,
> But can endure it all most patiently."

Not by any means an heroic temperament, nor one that makes a man potent either for good or evil, it is one that early learns to smile at all the ills of life that fall short of actual tragic dignity. And in other respects my fortune has not been all unkind. My parents gave me a physical machinery as admirable

> "As I were made and set aside to show—
> The body's habit wholly laudable."

There are few men of nine-and-forty who can say that they have never known a day's serious sickness, or suffered so much as a headache that they have not richly earned. And even failure and its consequent poverty are by no means entirely evils. For one thing, they teach a man who, among the thousands he jostles on the crowded highways of the world, are his real friends. The poor man knows that the hand offered to him is cordial, that he is truly welcome at the board to which he is invited, that the wine he drinks there is of an honest vintage, and poured out for him with a

ready hand and a kind heart. *Si je ne suis pas la rose, j'ai vécu bien près d'elle*—I know many of the men whose names ring loudest in the public ear, who have made the fame and the money I was once so fain to make, and I do not know that they are much happier than I, or that, at the final balancing of things, I shall have much to envy them.

I have read much that has been written in praise of poverty, but I have nowhere come across a statement of certain considerations to which my own experience has introduced me. I am not in the least trying to be funny or clever at the expense of common-sense when I say that it is one of my deepest convictions that there is no man now living who, not having enjoyed that advantage, would not have been hugely improved by a spell—say, twelve months—of financial distress as severe as is compatible with safety to life and could be supported without permanent injury to health. And I hold that statement to be truer the higher may be the man's social position, the greater the power he wields, the more unbounded the wealth he possesses. There is no other experience so splendidly educational as for a man to stand in his native nakedness and impotence, between the bare earth and the bleak sky, and to recognise that whether he lives or dies is, of all things in the world, the most absolutely unimportant to the world at large. I have sometimes thought that no man who has not drunk to the dregs that bitter cup of wholesome humiliation can be quite perfectly a man. I do not know, and cannot conceive, of any really efficient substitute for that terrible and fortifying lesson.

To have come through a storm of fire on a battle-field, to have passed days of hunger and despair in a small boat on the wide waste of ocean, to have forced, or to have failed to force, some great and necessary piece of legislation singlehanded down the throats of an insubordinate majority, to have faced and dominated a mob yelling for one's life-blood—such feats as these have been the furnace to mould and temper hearts of noble heroism. But in the bitter moments they can give, there is a consoling and strengthening dignity. There is nothing dignified in being friendless, foodless, and impotent in a great city; and nothing in the least pride-inspiring in escaping from such a dilemma—that puts you merely on the level of the poorest scavenger working in the street. You feel as helpless as an unshelled crab on a rock; very mean, very poor, very cheap, as negligible as neglected; and it is very good for you, if you are really a man, and not a mere bundle of appetites, lusts, vanity, and self-importance, made up to look like one. It gives you an amazing relish for the next plateful of victual you strike, and—again, if you are a man, and not the other thing—it gives you an intense pity for those unfortunates who have not touched at the Isle of Provant, and are still wandering on the desolate waters from which you have escaped. In a wisely-ordered State such an experience would be insisted on as an indispensable part of the education of all potentates of all kinds whatsoever; all Kings or Presidents of republics, all Princes of the Blood Royal, all Dukes, Marquises, Earls, Viscounts, Barons, Baronets, heads of State departments,

permanent officials, millionaires, editors, journalists, authors, publicists, town and borough councillors, employers of labour, and members of that venerable, if somewhat mouldy institution, the House of Commons—of every person, without exception, who claims the smallest authority in any kind of public business, or attempts in any way to influence public action. Socialism is coming with the inevitability of death and the accelerating velocity of a falling stone, but that one reform would bring it with the rapidity of light. The human average is on the right side, always and everywhere, and the people who rule us are for the most part good men, not more selfish or brutal than any similar number of people drawn from other ranks. But they do not *know*—they have not acquired that ultimate wisdom which nothing but an empty belly can impart; and no man who has never been hungry—unless he be a born saint, sage, and philanthropist—can make an efficient legislator.

It was not long after parting with Christie at Nice that I made a journalistic *liaison* which resulted, in a rather odd and out-of-the-way fashion, in cementing the longest, firmest, and dearest friendship of my life. I joined the staff of the *Hawk*, a sixpenny weekly paper run and officered by a small crowd of cheery journalistic Ishmaelites, of whom one or two, including Augustus Moore and James Glover—the latter now and for many years past musical conductor at Drury Lane—were old friends of mine. It was an impudent, irreverent, utterly irrelevant and candidly libellous

little sheet, which, by sheer dint of those qualities *plus* a good deal of slangy cleverness, rapidly became a power among that curious social contingent known as "The Smart Set." Like the ideal Christian in relation to this passing world, I was rather *in* the *Hawk* office than *of* it, having neither the money nor the inclination to mix much with the crowd for which the paper catered. It had, or professed to have, a serious side, and it gave me chances which more "respectable" journals would never have afforded for the plain expression of my convictions on many subjects. I have always had a strong dash of *l'esprit frondeur*, and took full advantage of my liberty. The late Harry Quilter had just started his brilliant but short-lived *Universal Review*, and in one of his earlier numbers appeared an article by Robert Buchanan on "The Modern Young Man as Critic," written with all that forthright candour which used to mark its author's polemical utterances. Moore and myself were more or less *liés* with one or two of the people Buchanan most pitilessly attacked, and Moore suggested that I should reply to the article. The passage in which, in my "Critical Appreciation of Robert Buchanan," I recounted the incident may as well do duty here.

"My feelings towards Buchanan at that time were of a somewhat mixed description, compounded of admiration for the genius evidenced in his best work and regret that he should so often fall below the lofty level which, in his happier moments, he attained and kept so easily; and in my criticism of 'The Modern Young Man as

Critic' the second of those sentiments certainly found stronger expression than the first. I had at that time a tendency, which perhaps even now I have not altogether outworn, to let my pen run away with me, and to express the passing mood of the moment with unnecessary strength. What I said was, as Buchanan himself subsequently confessed, true enough, but it was truth savagely spoken, and I have to own that the article was permeated by a certain air of personal resentment quite unjustified by the circumstances of the case. My acquaintance with Buchanan was at that moment of the slightest, but as the hazards of life drew us closer and closer together I regretted my virulence more and more, and when, some months after the appearance of my ill-tempered article, Buchanan, by a most thoughtful and quite unsolicited act of friendship, showed how kindly he had come to regard me, I felt that the hour for full confession had arrived. I wrote to him, avowing myself the author of the article and apologising more for its manner than its matter. His reply was like himself—frank, cordial, generous. 'Nobody knows better than I how, in these random fights of the literary arena, a man loses his temper and strikes harder than he need. I have many such sins on my conscience. There is really very little in your article that you need regret, and indeed, knowing how you feel on these matters, I do not see how you could well have written otherwise. . . . To requite your candour, I was fairly certain that you had written the article, and *quite* certain, if my belief was true, that you would

sooner or later "own up" to it. Don't avoid me like the plague because you have voluntarily gone into the confessional, but come up to dinner next Sunday and do penance.' The matter was never again mentioned between us, and this apparently untoward accident was the starting-point of an absolutely unchequered friendship of more than twelve years' duration. I mention it here only because it was so richly characteristic of a side of Buchanan's nature which the majority of people, knowing him merely from his published utterances, could hardly believe him to possess. A man of passionately cherished ideals, most of which were utterly opposed to the practice of his day; a man who, while he lived, must freely speak whenever truth he saw, at whatever cost to the feelings or interests of individuals; he was incapable of the least personal malice towards an opponent."

Buchanan's influence upon my character, my outlook upon the world, my entire nature, was profound, and will be life-long. It is my most constant and enduring regret that I did not come into intimate contact with him sixteen years earlier, at the outset of my active career. This book is a record of my own personal experiences, and not a detailed study of the lives of other men—an autobiography, not a literary cinematograph of other personalities. But no man can truly recount his own life without telling in part the lives of other men, and Buchanan was so cardinal a factor in mine, and was, moreover, in himself so interesting a figure, that I shall make no apology for presenting as clear an idea of the antecedent forces which had

made him what he was when I met him as my poor skill can compass.

Perpetually, and at all epochs of his life, it had been Buchanan's fortune to be in revolt against his immediate surroundings. Born into Robert Owen's "New Social World," "nourished," as he himself has told us, "on the husks of Socialism and the chill waters of Infidelity," having hardly, until at ten years of age he went to Scotland, heard the name of God, the innate theological leaven which was to make him all his life a seeker after some divine sanctification of our moral existence worked in him from his earliest years. In his "Latter Day Leaves" he tells us: "All my experience, my birth, my education, my entire surroundings, were against the birth or growth of the sweet spirit of natural piety; all the human beings I had known or listened to were confirmed sceptics or boisterous unbelievers. Yet while my father was confidently preaching God's non-existence, I was praying to God in the language of the canonical books. I cannot even remember a time when I did not kneel by my bedside before going to sleep, and repeat the Lord's Prayer. So far away was I from any human sympathy in this foolish matter, that this praying of mine was ever done secretly, with a strong sense of shame and dread of discovery." The elder Buchanan's friends, Lloyd Jones, Archibald Campbell, William Turvey—names which are not even names to the present generation, which cares for as little as it knows of the debt it owes to them and their intellectual kindred—were apostles of free-thought, of which he was himself, in his day,

an enthusiastic advocate. Not merely in pious Glasgow, but throughout Great Britain generally, men of such views were, at that time, social outcasts, shunned and boycotted by all respectable people. In her biography of Buchanan, Miss Harriett Jay tells us: "The poet's father was an object of special detestation, and he himself, as the son of a notorious unbeliever, was very early taught the lesson of social persecution. If he made an acquaintance of his own age, that boy was generally warned against him and taught to give him the cold shoulder. 'Don't play with yon laddie,' the boys would say, 'his father's an infidel.' Ridiculous as the record of this persecution may appear, it caused the lad at the time a great deal of misery, and later on, when we spoke together of those days of his youth, he assured me that many a time he had prayed with all his soul that his father would mend his ways, go to Church, and accept the social sanctities like other men."

This bitter apprenticeship had its results, readable alike in his life and in his work. The chilly atmosphere of atheism revolted him, and he escaped from it—entirely for a brief time, though I doubt if after he took to the study of modern thought, as expounded by Spencer, Huxley, Haeckel, and Buchner, there was ever a moment in which he felt complete certainty of God or of eternal life. His brain and heart were at odds upon the question, and remained to the last unreconciled. That life-long struggle and the vivid memory he retained to the last of his childish

unhappiness, which might have soured or hardened a poorer nature, were to him influences almost purely beneficent. He learned in suffering what he taught in song, and not only in song but in daily word and deed: a large tolerance of all forms of doubt and belief, an abiding sense of the sacredness of that inner light which every thinking man must kindle and tend within himself. His obstinate clinging to a religious scheme of which he came to see clearly the logical weakness was in no small measure and to a great degree unconsciously the result of his poetic temperament. Christianity and many of its corollaries were æsthetically beautiful to him. Miss Jay tells how he loved the sound of church bells, and the reading of the passage vividly recalls one summer Sunday morning in the country, when we lay sheltered from the brilliant sunshine by the branches of a huge elm, listening to the mingled music from the spires of half a dozen adjacent villages. "What will life be worth when that is heard no more?" he asked. His sense of abiding kinship with those he loved was a deeper reason for his obstinate clinging to the hope of immortality. It was so strong and militant that at moments its angry revolt seemed to conquer his intellect completely. As Tennyson has it—

> "Like a man in wrath, the soul
> Stood up and answered, 'I have felt'!"

"I don't care a curse for your 'scientific evidence,'" I have heard him say to a friend with whom he was disputing. "It isn't thinkable that I should not

meet certain people again. I *must* meet them, and I know that I *shall*." He would not admit at such moments that his intense longing for the society of his lost friends was no proof of the validity of his hope, nor that future generations, nourished in the Thanatist creed, would accept eternal separation with none of the pangs he suffered. "They will lose more than they will gain," was his reply to such attempts at consolation. "It is only the certainty of an immortality to be shared with the souls we love that can give such a wretched business as life the smallest value. If this existence is all, it is not worth a burned-out match."

"Our friends and our enemies," says Thackeray, with his own easy and delightful cynicism, "both paint our portraits, and both portraits are like us." That is true as a general statement, but like most other general statements it has its exceptions, and the most glaring exception I have ever known was furnished by Robert Buchanan. The portraits of him painted by his enemies were ludicrous caricatures, or rather, clumsy libels, for caricature is only worthy of the name when it depends on the wilful distortion of some really characteristic feature, and is recognisable without having the name of its alleged original displayed in large letters on the frame. I have listened on many occasions to views of Buchanan's character, and more—to personally guaranteed excerpts from his biography—which, in their ludicrous falseness to the very groundwork of his being as I intimately knew it, remain among the most marvellous utterances I have ever heard from human lips. Such libels on his character and

travesties of his actions were, in the cases I refer to, invariably the utterances of people absolutely unacquainted with him, but that such legends should have been invented and should have gained the smallest degree of currency was typical of much. It was the result of the bitterness which characterised the literary quarrels of the older generation, as evidenced in the furiously indecent diatribes of the earlier writers for the Quarterlies and "Blackwood's." Buchanan's onslaught on the reputation of certain pets of the critical Press—*e.g.* Messrs. Swinburne and Rossetti—and on certain powerful journalistic cliques, had begotten a passion of hatred in the breasts of the smaller partisans of the people he attacked, who found no aspersion too foul for the disturber of the feast of mutual flattery. A legend sprang up, a sort of "archetypal" figure was invented, horrific as the horned and tailed devil of the mediæval Christian. We are more tolerant, perhaps because less in earnest, nowadays, and look back with wonder on the fashions of conducting disputes which, even to our fathers, seemed natural enough.

Mark Twain somewhere remarks that "the principal difference between a cat and a lie is that a cat has only nine lives." An exemplification of this great truth may be found in the fashion in which certain legendary misstatements regarding Buchanan's once-famous article on "The Fleshly School of Poetry," published in the *Contemporary Review*, still pass from mouth to mouth. Mr. J. Comyns Carr's recently-published volume, "Some Eminent Victorians," and the article headed

"Anonymous" in the current edition of Chambers's Encyclopædia, both contain garbled statements regarding that effusion. It is, or should be, perfectly well known that the signature of "Thomas Maitland" was appended to the article, not by Buchanan, but by the editor of the Review. The statement that in the body of that article Buchanan had anonymously puffed his own compositions, could be repeated only by deliberate malice or by ignorance of the article itself. That article contains an imaginary cast of a performance of the tragedy of *Hamlet* by a company of contemporary poets, Tennyson figuring in the title-part, and Buchanan as "Cornelius," a "super," who, in the first act, speaks in a kind of brief duet with the scarcely more important character, "Voltimand," one single line addressed to the King—

"In that, and all things, will we show our duty."

That was the only reference, either to himself or his work, made in the entire article. These facts have been stated a score of times before, and will probably need to be stated as often again.

Buchanan was constitutionally passionate and occasionally wrong-headed. He cherished ideals which were often impracticable, and other ideals to whose fulfilment he himself frequently failed to attain. He occasionally allowed his pen to run away with him, and expressed the passing mood of the moment with needless strength. In a word, he was human, and had the defects of his qualities. But the defects, like the qualities of which they were the shadows, were essentially those of a strong,

honest, fearless man, and he never shrank from "owning up" when he felt that the heat of conflict had made him intemperate and unjust. Perhaps the most illuminating words I have ever read on this aspect of his character are contained in the chapter contributed to Miss Jay's "Biography" by Mr. R. E. Francillon: "The right reading of Buchanan was, I am convinced, that his very genius had prevented him from outgrowing, or being able to outgrow, the boyishness of the best sort of boy; while too many of us only too quickly forget what any sort of boyhood means. And the grand note of the best sort of boy is a sincere passion for justice, or rather a consuming indignation against injustice —the two things are not exactly the same. The boy of whatever age can never comprehend the coolness with which the grown-up man of the world has learned to take injustice as part and parcel of the natural order of things, even when himself the sufferer. The grown-up man has learned the sound policy of *not* sending indignation red-hot or white-hot to the post or the press, but of waiting till it is cool enough to insert in a barrel of gunpowder without risk of explosion. But the boy rebels, and, if he be among the great masters of language, hurls it out hot and strong, in the full belief that no honest feelings could be so weak as to be wounded by any honest words. Of course he was wrong. Complete honesty is perfectly compatible with even abnormal thinness of skin, and with an even exceptionally plentiful crop of corns. He would often have been amazed and shocked could he, to whom hard hitting was so easy, have estimated the effect of his blows.

I do not believe Robert Buchanan to have been capable of a malign or vindictive thought; I know that I never heard him utter an unkindly word. I wish, above all else, that those who thought of him as I had thought of him before knowing him could have met him at home—*Strasz-Engel, Haus-Teufel* ('Street Angel, House Devil,' say the Germans)—not that they have any monopoly of the experience. I have never heard the natural converse of the saying, but it is impossible to think of Buchanan without its suggestion."

Perhaps Buchanan did himself most harm, not by exposing the faults of men of real value, but by castigating the offences and ridiculing the pretensions of the smaller fry of literature and criticism. As he wrote in *The Outcast*:—

> "I've often, vexed by shrill annoys,
> Birched Art's precocious little boys."

It would have been very much better to have left such a task to other hands. Such small fry are as dangerous as hornets if provoked, and may be as useful as bees if fed and flattered, or even if left alone. It is not the *gros bonnets* of the Press, the stately three-deckers of literature and criticism, which it is principally the astute man's business to conciliate. It is the journalistic cock-boat which swarms on the waters of the Press which does the real execution. As many a beautiful and fertile island owes its existence to the incessant efforts of millions of scarce-perceptible insects, so many a great reputation has been steadily and solidly built by the animalculæ of journalism. Years before a

certain enormously popular novelist had attained to his present pride of place I prophesied his triumph, from the simple circumstance that whenever business took me to his place of residence I found him surrounded by a crowd of journalistic wirepullers, individually of small account, but with strength enough in their mass to create any number of literary reputations. Some day, no doubt, these scribbling *condottieri* will find their general. A man clever enough to form such a mob into a disciplined and obedient regiment could become a veritable artistic kingmaker, and might die worth any amount of money. Balzac's immortal "Treize" would not be "a circumstance" compared with such a federation. Quite seriously, I see no impossibility in the suggestion, and recommend it to the attention of any reader who believes himself to possess a turn for business organisation. Buchanan never could be persuaded either to conciliate such people or to let them alone. The truth is, he loved a fight, and if there happened to be no single opponent in the field worthy of his steel he was not above charging and slashing among the horde of penny-a-liners. He seemed to say, with old Ruy de Silva in "Hernani"—

> "Êtes-vous noble? Enfer!
> Noble ou non, pour croiser le fer avec le fer
> Tout homme qui m'outrage est assez gentilhomme."

Which was magnificent, but not war as wise men make it.

The period of my more intimate acquaintance with Buchanan came about in a fashion characteristic

of the somewhat "casual" natures of both of us. I had been for some time a frequent visitor at his house and guest at his table when, originally with the purpose of doing with him some piece of work which somehow never got done, I became an inmate under his roof. I went there for a day or two, like Ned Strong to Clavering Park, in "Pendennis," and stayed there nearly two years. When from time to time I mooted the subject of my departure Buchanan would not hear of it, and I am glad to believe that his constant asseveration that I was of great use to him was more or less really true, though a third person might often have been excused for wondering in what the use consisted. The only joint work bearing our joint names we ever issued were the novelised version of his Haymarket play, *The Charlatan*, and the comedy, *A Society Butterfly*, produced at the Opéra Comique, and of which the history shall presently be given. My real utility was as an intellectual strop and chopping-block. Buchanan was in certain respects, and apart from his warm domestic affections, a lonely man. He had never been, nor cared to be, popular with the bulk of men of anything like his own intellectual rank. I have seen but few people under his roof whose names were known outside the circle of their personal acquaintance. Herbert Spencer, of whom I have already spoken, I saw there only once. Hall Caine, then a young man just beginning to rise above the literary horizon, came occasionally. That old-time actor, the late John Coleman, who in his ingrained staginess of voice and manner suggested Mr. Crummles, and in his lightning alternations

between the depths of despair and the summits of irrational optimism recalled Mr. Micawber, was a more frequent figure. During his term of collaboration on Adelphi melodrama with Mr. George R. Sims he naturally saw a good deal of that genial jester, who could keep him in roars of laughter for hours at a time. The good things Sims said at Buchanan's supper-table were infinite in number, and among the best was one at my expense. I had been holding forth with most convincing eloquence regarding the condition of English fiction, and proclaiming the absolute necessity, if the art was not to sink wholly beneath contempt, of a fuller and more fearless treatment of sexual problems, when Sims shot my rhetoric dead by interjecting the heartless remark—"Murray's Guide to the in-Continent."

For years Buchanan had never possessed a male friend with whom he could be at his intellectual ease, who was interested in the problems of life and thought which most deeply interested him, and the fact that on every conceivable issue our views were diametrically opposed, and that we were both tough and enduring disputants, made me, I fully believe, a rather valuable companion to him. Scores of times the morning light surprised us in the midst of some interminable argument, and if, as was certainly the case, I was greatly the gainer by our interchange of thought, I gave back the best I had. During those two years of intimacy I came to know him more completely than I had ever known any other human creature with the exception of my brother Christie, and I am absolutely sincere in saying that he was, quite beyond comparison, the

best man I have ever known—the bravest, the most honest, the most cordial, the most kindly, the wisest in counsel, the readiest in help. There was not in his heart one hint of malice, nor in his blood one black drop against any creature in the whole round world. The only approach to a disagreement we ever had together was when he remonstrated with me *à propos* of an assault I had made on a writer who had some little time previously assaulted Buchanan himself on no provocation whatsoever and with unmeasured virulence. "For God's sake," he wrote, "leave —— alone. People who know of our friendship will think you are abusing him to please me. And you are unjust—more unjust than I was when I answered him. The man has done good stuff, and you only stultify yourself when you deny his merit." A life of incessant conflict can be good for no man, but no man born to such a life was ever less injured by it than Buchanan. I have read somewhere a story of some hard-fisted old Baresarker who, having knocked his enemy into a turbulent river, jumped in and fished him out at the imminent peril of his own life. That was the sort of double feat of which Buchanan was eminently capable.

It was a common sentiment regarding him, and one which finds utterance in Miss Jay's "Biography," that Buchanan's connection with the theatre was, from the view-point of his higher moral and mental interests, a mistake. I cannot think so. As is often, though by no means invariably, the case with men of his type, he added to his intellectual Ishmaelism the sunnier temperament of the born

Bohemian. He loved life: his nature demanded warm human contact, and he found both abundantly in the theatre, which, "respectable" as it has become of late years, is yet, and by its very constitution must for ever remain, the one impregnable citadel of social freedom. And he needed money. Personally a Spartan, with absolutely no expensive desires until, rather late in life, he tasted the pleasures of the Turf, he wanted money wherewith —literally—to *live*, to express the bubbling generosity of his temperament. He had spent the years most men spend in the pursuit of pleasure "sitting," as he himself expressed it, "empty-stomached on Parnassus," and when at last he descended from that dignified but rather comfortless altitude into the city streets he found the life there, in spite of its many horrors and squalors, good, sweet, fit on the whole for a man to live among and enjoy. That his stage work was coarse and poor contrasted with his verse is true enough. But it should, in plain justice, be recognised that here, as elsewhere, the duality of his nature asserted itself, and that the cheap sentiment of the Adelphi and the frivolity of the Vaudeville never either contaminated his more serious effort nor choked the springs of loftier thought. Read consecutively, Buchanan's output gives us the clearest mental image of a strenuous mounting of the slippery crags of artistic achievement. *The City of Dream*, *Mary the Mother*, *The Devil's Case*, *The Outcast*, were all written during the period of his dramatic activity, and their artistic value is high, and their inspiration sprang, crystal pure, from the deepest wells of the poet's moral

being. He touched pitch—if the writing of popular drama be to touch pitch, which I for one most resolutely deny—and was not defiled. He mingled with the sharpers of theatrical finance and with the moral riff-raff of the Turf, and neither could leave a fleck upon his honesty nor on his enduring conviction of the inherent rightness of human nature. He was indeed himself the Archetypal Poet of whom he wrote :—

> "Who, 'spite the bitter fight for bread,
> 'Spite Samson's mill-work blindly done,
> 'Spite piteous tears in secret shed,
> Still kept his forehead to the sun."

Mr. Israel Zangwill shed a welcome ray of light on Buchanan's personality when he wrote : "The mistake people make about Buchanan is that they think that there is only one of him. There are at least a score of Buchanans, and most of them have not even a nodding acquaintance with the others." As a pendant to that brilliant bit of analysis let me recount an incident from my recollections of Buchanan's Turf career. It was at a time when he was amassing material for a study of the life of Christ. I found him standing in the middle of Tattersall's ring, absorbed in the study of his Greek Testament, perfectly oblivious of the life about him until, at the warning clangour of the saddling-bell, he restored the volume to his pocket, marking his place with a tip-telegram, and plunged amid the roaring "pencillers," as eager for the fray as any one among them. It was at once one of the quaintest oddities of my experience and a wonderful touch of unconscious self-portraiture.

We had been occupied one day in turning over an old trunk full of *disjecta membra*, such as every busy literary workman is sure to accumulate, and had come across an incomplete first act of a comedy, written some years previously. It bore no name, and was in a quite inchoate condition. At Buchanan's request I read it, and gave it as my opinion that it was worth knocking into shape and completing. We were rather languidly discussing its possibilities when I chanced upon a paragraph in one of the daily papers to the effect that Mr. George Edwardes had offered Mrs. Langtry her own terms to appear as a dancer at the Empire. This gave me a notion of how the idea of the piece might be put to immediate profit, and with Buchanan's consent I at once took a cab to Pont Street and interviewed the lady, with whom I had already a slight but friendly acquaintance. Mrs. Langtry laughed at the rumour—she was far too ambitious of the legitimate laurels of the regular stage to compromise her hopes by accepting such an offer—indeed, I have an impression that the report was altogether unfounded, and that the proposition had never been made at all. I then suggested to her that it might prove a strong attraction if she would consent to appear in a piece of which the principal *clou* should be a scene in which she danced—such a scene, for instance, as might take place at a great country-house at which the guests should get up a mimic realisation of a London music-hall to take the place of the ordinary "private theatricals." Mrs. Langtry grasped the idea at once, and Buchanan and I set to work on the piece, for which we

hit upon the title, *A Society Butterfly*. Mrs. Langtry liked the piece so well that she would gladly have financed it herself, and looking back on what actually happened I am sorry that that arrangement was not adopted. But Buchanan's fortunes were desperate, and we determined to float the venture by forming a syndicate, the piece representing our contribution to the capital, and we taking half the profit. The syndicate, when formed, consisted of four members besides ourselves. One of them was a lady who appeared in the cast, and another a gentleman, at that time a conspicuous figure in the City, and at this moment working out a sentence of two years' hard labour. Whatever may have been his failings in other directions, with us he was perfectly square and above-board, which is more than can be said for two other members of the syndicate, who reduced every shilling they advanced to less than half its value by unbusiness-like delay and irritating interference.

One of our earliest necessities was, of course, the finding of a suitable theatre. A certain commodious house in the West End had been vacant for some months past, and we determined to apply for it, and wrote with that object to a lady, celebrated some years earlier as a beautiful and accomplished actress, who was known to all London as the sole proprietor of the building in question. We received an answer from the lady's solicitors, referring us to her husband. We called upon the gentleman, and the consequent interview was one of the quaintest bits of comedy I remember. He was a long, lean, hard-bitten old Scotsman, with a

truly wonderful resemblance to a deerhound—I have seen dogs of that breed that might have sat for his portrait—and he had an accent with which phonetics would wrestle in vain. "Ye want to tak the theeter?" he said. "Ay! Weel, the rent is a thoosand puns pair week, the tenant tae provide gahs, eelectreeceetee, an' watter." Buchanan explained that we were not, for the moment, *buying* theatres, and that all we wanted just then was to hire one. "Ay," said the old gentleman. "Ah ken pairfectly weel what ye want. Those are the tairms"—and he repeated them. "And who do you suppose is going to pay such terms?" asked Buchanan. "Nae leevin' cratur, ootside o' Bedlam. Ye see," he continued, with a dry twitch of the lips which appeared to be the nearest approach to a smile of which he was capable, "Ah built yon hoose as a bairthday present for my wife, an' med it ower till her by a deed o' geeft in the strectest legal forrm. But, not havin' takken final leave o' ma beesiness senses, Ah pit in a clause to the effec' that Ah was to hae the lettin' o't at ony rent Ah thocht rizzonable at ony given moment. Sax months syne her leddyship and I had a wheen pickle meesunderstandin', an' she tuik hersel' aff to Pawris. The theeter was lat, an' the rent was paid till her as pair contrac'. Then the run o' the piece feenished, the tenancy detairmined, and Ah'm askin' the tairms Ah tauld ye. Ah'm thinkin' it likely my wife'll be back in the coorse of a week or twa." We left the old gentleman with a strong sense of his powers as a domestic diplomatist, and ultimately took the Opéra Comique, for which we paid £60 per week, nearly

half of which was made up to us by the rent of the bars, sublet to a speculating firm of caterers.

The Opéra Comique has disappeared from the face of London, so nothing I can say about it now can hurt anybody's pocket or anybody's feelings. It was, during its existence, a house of mixed fortunes. It had held great successes at odd times, among which it will suffice to mention *Trial by Jury*, *The Sorcerer*, *Ariane*, *As in a Looking-glass*, and *Joan of Arc*, but it had also known long periods of failure, and it was at such a time that we succeeded in obtaining the lease at so low a rental. Theatrical managers and speculators are —with the possible exception of publishers—more dominated by superstition than any other class of people in the world, and I met plenty of folk who took it for granted that in leasing the Opéra Comique we had reduced failure to an absolute certainty. Fail we did, as the sequel will show, but our failure was not in any sense the fault of the theatre. It never is. Years earlier, I had heard Augustus Harris sum up and terminate a discussion on that subject one evening at the Greenroom Club, in his usual trenchant style. "Unlucky theatres be damned! Get the right piece and put the right people into it, and the public will tumble over each other to get there, if you produced it up in the ball of St. Paul's or down in the sewers." Harris had a right to speak, for Drury Lane, which under his management was a veritable gold mine, had been a synonym for failure for years before he took it. One of my few wealthy acquaintances, who had backed more than one preceding

management, used to say that he never passed down Catherine Street without feeling a pain in his cheque-book. I am old enough to remember all Belgravia and Mayfair crowding to the Philharmonic, which occupied in Islington part of the site now covered by the Grand Theatre, and was known by the excellently-descriptive cognomen of "The Dust Hole," when *Géneviève de Brabant*, one of the first specimens of Opéra Bouffe seen in England, was produced there. There is not a theatre in London of twenty years' standing which has not known similar fluctuations of fortune. People said openly that Mr.—now Sir—John Hare must be mad to spend hundreds of pounds in renovating the Globe—another vanished theatrical landmark. Yet the Globe had in its time held *Jo*, *Les Cloches de Corneville*, *The Private Secretary*, *Charley's Aunt*, and a dozen other huge successes; and Sir John's production there of *The Gay Lord Quex* was one of the biggest hits of recent years.

Augustus Harris was altogether too remarkable a personality to be passed over with a casual mention. My connection with him was never really intimate, but we were friendly acquaintances, and something more than that, for several years. Such intimacy as we had together began a little unpropitiously. *The World*, his first production at Drury Lane, and one which has never been surpassed in the peculiar features of the class of melodrama with which he was associated, was in the early nights of its hugely successful run when I turned up at the theatre one evening accompanied

by a friend. I have learned since that it is not considerate to ask for "paper" for a declared success, but I was in the first flush of my short-lived happiness and importance as a critic of a London daily, and had a sort of unformulated conviction—which some critics seem to retain their whole lives long—that it should be the joy and pride of any manager to give me anything in that way I cared to ask for. Harris was standing beside the box-office, and I made my appeal to him personally for a couple of stalls. He set his thumbs in the armholes of his dress waistcoat—a favourite gesture—and replied, "My dear Henry Murray, would you like to put your hand in my pocket and take out a guinea?" Somewhat nettled, I replied to the effect that I had known the time, and that not so long ago, when the feat would have been impossible, and was turning away when he drew me back with a laugh, and gave me the vouchers with so charming a good temper that I repented me of my ill-natured retort. We got on together excellently afterwards, and he showed the kindness with which he regarded me on more than one occasion, and in his own peculiar fashion. I was sitting one night in the rotunda at Drury Lane, plunged in a brown study, when I became aware of somebody regarding me. Looking up I recognised Harris. "What are you looking so rotten miserable about?" was his greeting. I replied that I had not known that I did so look. "What's the trouble?" he continued; and went on without waiting for an answer, "There's only one trouble in the world that matters—money. Would twenty

pounds do you any good?" "Do you know anybody it wouldn't do good to?" I asked in return, perhaps a little crustily, for I thought of course that he was merely chaffing me. "A civil question deserves a civil answer," said Harris, and repeated his query. I naturally replied, "Yes." "Then come along and you shall have it," he said, and in the calmest fashion led the way to his office, where he made out and handed to me a cheque for the amount mentioned. I never knew, and never shall know, his motive, if it was not sheer kindness of heart rather eccentrically exhibited. On another occasion I called on him on some matter of business at his house in St. John's Wood. At the end of our interview, he said, "This is my birthday. What have you brought me?" I replied that being ignorant of the occasion I had nothing to offer but the customary good wishes. "That won't do," he said. "This is my birthday, and gifts must pass; so, if you won't give me anything, I'll give *you* something." He presented me with a box of a hundred excellent cigars and a pretty little silver cigarette-case, the latter of which was filched from my pocket in the street less than a week after.

That he was not merely generous, but genuinely tender-hearted, was proved to me by an odd little incident. He was made one of the sheriffs for the County of London, and on the day on which the appointment was gazetted I met him at the theatre. The piece then running was *A Sailor and his Lass*, by Buchanan and Miss Harriett Jay, and its last act contained a gruesome scene, in which the hero —a part played by Harris himself — wrongfully

convicted of murder, performed his last toilet in the condemned cell in Newgate, and was then strapped by the executioner previous to passing on to the gallows. The accuracy of some details of the scene had been questioned by one or two of the papers, so, after congratulating Harris on his elevation to civic dignity, I jestingly added that the next time he needed to reproduce such an effect he would probably have actual personal experience to go upon. "What do you mean?" he asked in a startled voice. I explained that the sheriffs took it in rotation to superintend executions taking place within the sphere of their duties, and that on the doctrine of averages he would pretty certainly be called upon to witness the extinction of at least one criminal during his year of office. "*I* see a man hanged!" he exclaimed. "Not for the Bank of England! I'd rather throw up the berth—I'd rather be hanged myself!" I have seldom seen a man more relieved than he was at my explaining that he could always employ a deputy, and that there would not be the least difficulty in finding one.

Harris was a king of managers and producers, and I do not believe that any man that ever lived could have taught him his business. His recipe for concocting the huge spectacles by which he made his name and his fortune was beautifully simple. "There are three things," he once said to me, "that the great British public cares for—love, the Turf, and battles. You can get a good piece out of any one of 'em, but mix 'em, and you've got the public by the short hairs." I am not much of a theatre-goer in these latter days, and can say

little of the autumn dramas recently produced at Drury Lane from actual experience, but I have never seen a detailed notice of one of them which has not suggested Augustus Harris floating, a sort of tutelary spectre, above the heads of the collaborators whose names figure on the bill.

He was a man who did everything greatly, and indulged in both work and pleasure on the gigantic scale. I shall never forget the first time I saw him eat. I had wandered into the stalls of the Adelphi during a performance of *The English Rose.* He was in a box, in which he signalled to me to join him. We saw the performance out together, and crossed the Strand to the Tivoli, then not a music hall, but a restaurant. He ordered the biggest fowl in the house to be grilled according to some peculiar fashion he detailed to the cook, and a bottle of whisky. I ate a fair portion of the fowl, and accounted for two moderate doses of the spirit. He quietly and unostentatiously disposed of the remainder, and we went to the Greenroom Club, where, in an absent-minded sort of way in the intervals of conversation, he took a light dessert, consisting of the major part of a small Stilton cheese, a basket of pulled bread, and a glassful of celery, washed down with more whisky. No amount of alcohol seemed ever in the least to disconcert him, and long spells of toil which would have utterly exhausted others left him fresh and fit. Perhaps, had he been more akin to other men in the articles of nerve and driving-force, he might have had a longer career—a fuller one would have been hardly possible. He ran till he dropped, and

there is a sad, pathetic ring in the memory of the last words he ever spoke: "Let no one wake me —I want a good long sleep." It is hard to imagine that glowing spark from the great central incandescence quenched in the cold darkness of death. If, some day passing the familiar portals of the theatre he ruled, I should find him standing there, his hat at the old angle, his feet apart, his bright eye beaming its old, cheery, friendly defiance of all created things, "I should not feel it to be strange."

To return to *A Society Butterfly*. Buchanan was, in sporting parlance, "going for the gloves," and was determined to give adverse fortune no chances. Few pieces produced by a scratch management have been better cast. Beside Mrs. Langtry, our company comprised that admirable actor, the late William Herbert; Miss Rose Leclerq, the Dugazon of her country and generation, quite the best aristocratic old woman I have ever seen on the English boards; Mr. Fred Kerr, who had already won the place he has since retained in the affections of the London public; poor Edward Rose, a quaint comedian, a graceful jester, and a thoroughly good and lovable fellow, whose all-too-early death was at once a loss to the stage and to the drama; and Mr. Allan Beaumont, then an excellent "old man," and now a Professor of Elocution at the Guildhall. All were happy in their parts, and all worked with right good will, although in that particular the palm must be awarded to Mrs. Langtry, who had not only to acquire the words and the business of the leading

part, but also to study a "Butterfly Dance" specially arranged for her by Mr. Willie Ward. It would be an exaggeration of flattery to say that Mrs. Langtry, as we know her, is actually a great actress, but since my experience with her on the stage of the Opéra Comique, I have had a conviction that she has missed the highest distinction in her adopted profession only because she came to its practice too late in life. Had she begun her professional career ten, or even half a dozen years earlier, at a period when her personality was less fixed and more malleable, she might have made a truly great artist. She possesses in a high degree the sentiment of the boards, and she has a gift Providence is not too fond of bestowing upon women of unusual physical beauty—the gift of brains. I cannot acquit the beautiful lady of her share in our disaster, but that makes it only the more imperative that I should give her the meed she fairly earned, and no chorus girl on her promotion could have been more willing, more patient, more eager to give all possible satisfaction to the management than was Mrs. Langtry. And in one particular she acted with a rare generosity, for which both Buchanan and myself were deeply grateful. She insisted on taking from our shoulders the financial burden of dressing her for her part, and the series of Parisian "creations" in which she appeared would certainly have strained our modest resources. And here we made one mistake —a mistake so foolish that it will remain inexplicable to me until I die how we *could* have made it—we insisted on providing the "butterfly dress" in

which she was to perform her dance. That mistake resulted in the ruin of our hopes. The butterfly dress arrived a night or two before the evening we had advertised for production, and at the first sight of it Mrs. Langtry refused, point-blank and absolutely, to appear in it. And here the syndicate came in and clinched our ruin. A postponement of a day or two would have given Mrs. Langtry time to slip across to Paris, to select a dress suited to her own taste, and so to appear in the dance, which was, as I have said, the very hub of our piece. But the syndicate raised a despairing wail about the folly, the madness, of "disappointing the public." Buchanan and I pointed out to them that their fear was based on what is perhaps the hollowest of all the innumerable silly superstitions which beset—and besot—the managerial mind; that the public was profoundly indifferent whether or not *A Society Butterfly* was ever played at all; that all that that section of the public which would be present on the first night—whenever that might be—would care about, was whether the piece then presented interested or failed to interest them. But our logic was vain. They held us to the letter of our agreement—we had advertised to open on a certain night, and open we must. Without the dress, the dance was meaningless, and had to go by the board; so in hot haste we set to work to devise a series of "living pictures," in the last of which Mrs. Langtry was to appear as "Lady Godiva" about to mount for her solitary progress through Coventry.

The great night arrived, and the house was

packed with an audience which may fairly be described as distinguished. The two first acts went magnificently, and I have seldom seen an audience on better terms with itself and its entertainers. Mrs. Langtry's appearance in the third act was the signal for a genuine ovation. She had reserved the most beautiful of her dresses for that scene, and the now historic jewels, afterwards so cleverly stolen from the custody of her bankers, were all displayed. She must have been pawnable as she stood for at least five-and-twenty thousand pounds. The act proceeded prosperously until it arrived at the *tableaux vivants*, of which the first two or three were mere "bread-and-butter" arrangements, intended only to usher in the great effect of our leading lady's appearance as "Lady Godiva." The *tableaux* were shown on a mimic stage built over the real one, and composed mainly of a huge sheet of thick plate-glass, beneath which had been arranged four powerful limelights. These were supplemented by four others in the flies, and by yet four more in the wings, the intention being to create the illusion of a figure poised in mid-air in an atmosphere of blinding light. As, however, the only lime which acted was a blue one, which fell on the back of Mrs. Langtry's head and converted it into the semblance of a bowl of snap-dragon, the intention passed unrealised. In a theatrical experience of thirty years I have never seen so sudden a change come over the spirit of an audience. The house, which five minutes earlier had been rippling with laughter and echoing with applause, instantaneously became a pandemonium

compared with which the parrot-house at the Zoo, or the House of Commons on an Irish field night in the palmiest days of the Parnellite *régime*, would have seemed a haunt of dull tranquillity.

It was a nasty knock, and I have seldom enjoyed myself less than during the hour I spent next morning in skimming the notices in the daily papers. Buchanan was acutely hated by a good many pressmen, and what little sentiment existed amongst them regarding myself was not entirely friendly. The incidents which arose out of one of the notices can now only be touched upon with reserve, since the person who wrote it is dead. He was a person of importance in his day—or rather, to speak more justly, the journal for which he wrote was important—and what he had to say was so obviously spiteful and so flagrantly unjust that Buchanan and I determined publicly to resent it. This we did by appearing before the curtain after the second act on the following night. Buchanan read the notice to the audience, and proceeded to a plain, unvarnished statement of his opinion of the writer; I following with a few brief words of endorsement. The house, delighted, as any chance assembly of people always will be, by such a manifestation of the fighting spirit, cheered uproariously. Buchanan was in fine comminatory form that night, and I thought—and think—that no honest man with a grain of pluck could have sat quiet under so tremendous an insult so publicly inflicted. But the journalist in question did not happen to be conspicuous either for honesty or for courage, and there was no fight.

A bad first-night reception does not necessarily spell death to a theatrical venture, and *A Society Butterfly* played for seven weeks to houses each one of which held rather more money than its predecessor—the most encouraging symptom a struggling entertainment can show. We had touched paying business, and the receipts were still mounting, when we made our second and fatal mistake in our diplomatic relations with our principal star. After the second night the butterfly dance had been performed by a clever lady who bore a marked physical resemblance to Mrs. Langtry, a likeness so increased by a mere dash of make-up that a good many people not intimately acquainted with the latter lady's personal appearance accepted her as Mrs. Langtry in person. But the majority of the public was, of course, better informed. While Mrs. Langtry refrained from performing the dance the piece was practically meaningless, and we did our best to persuade her to perform that part of her contract, but in vain. The piece, she declared, was "doing well enough as it was." A little patience and diplomacy might have accommodated everything, but here again the syndicate was peremptory, and we had to offer Mrs. Langtry the alternative—dance or go. She went, and, with an understudy in her part the receipts fell practically to nothing, and within another week the "Butterfly" had fluttered its last.

The ruin of the piece was made inevitable by what was perhaps the most galling accident I remember in a not too fortunate career. Buchanan and I went down to Lingfield one afternoon

specially to back a horse named Theseus, about which we had received private information we thought too valuable to be neglected. We moored the brougham rather far down on the carriage line, and stayed with it, so as to keep away from the excitement of the ring, and avoid temptations to fritter away our capital—£100—on bets on earlier events, Theseus being booked for the fourth race. We had reckoned on the horses parading as usual before the stands, instead of which they passed round by the other end of the oval to the starting-place, and the first intimation we had of their presence in the field was the roar which announced their start for the race. I set out on a desperate run for the ring, and reached the gate in time to see the horse we should have backed cantering home with a disdainful ease. He had started at 20 to 1, and we had missed £2000—a sum which would have enabled us to defy the syndicate and follow our own course of action. I have to confess that I raged exceedingly, but Buchanan took the *contretemps* as he accepted every other misfortune I ever saw him undergo, with unruffled tranquillity.

My collaboration in *A Society Butterfly* was not actually my first appearance as a dramatist. A year or two previously I had gone on tour with Christie in his New Zealand melodrama, *Ned's Chum*, doubling two small parts in the second and third acts, and he had produced a curtain raiser from my pen, founded at the suggestion of Mr. George R. Sims on a short story I had contributed to the *Dispatch*. For some years I had made the

writing of drama my ultimate objective, and to that end had taken an infinity of pains to conquer the technique of the stage. I must have seen at least a couple of thousand plays during my time as dramatic critic of various papers; I had watched the rehearsals of dozens, whenever I could persuade a good-natured manager to permit me the privilege, and I had read hundreds, principally of French manufacture. And when I say "read," I do not mean "skimmed." I read them, so to speak, with a microscope, intent on absorbing the secret of each writer's mastery of the boards. Alone and in collaboration I am the author of seventeen pieces, of which four have seen the light, and on others of which I have received various sums of money in consideration of a right to produce which has never been exercised. The luck which pursued me during my literary career was also my faithful attendant in my dramatic ventures. I have now and for some time past accepted it in the same acquiescent spirit, and do not think it likely that I shall ever again attempt to storm the theatrical citadel. The lure which attracts most literary men to the stage is, of course, the money that may be made there. It is certainly the Tom Tiddler's Ground of the fortunate few who succeed in pleasing the managers first and the public afterwards. But money is, of all the really important things of which life is made, to me the least attractive and the least interesting, and the disagreeables connected with the pursuit of stage-success are, of all others, the least tolerable to a man of my temper and habits.

The stage-door is the Frontier of No Man's Land. It is the nearest possible occidental equivalent of that "somewhere east o' Suez" for which Mr. Kipling's hero so passionately longed, where there ain't no Ten Commandments. If it have any laws of its own, if its apparent chaos is really resolvable to any sort of rule or order, my acquaintance with it—for a pretty long period a fairly close acquaintance—was insufficient to reveal them to me. Outside the theatre, the actor nowadays is quite like any other kind of man. He has, in greater or lesser revenue, the virtues and vices, the strengths and weaknesses, common to humankind. His emotions, his tendencies, his views of things, are ordinary, orderly, and calculable. But, when once his foot has crossed that mystic threshold, a change comes over him. His moral and mental diapason alters its pitch, he looks on things from a new and bewildering view-point. Beyond the stage-door east ceases to be east, or west, west; the world in which the actor's inner being moves becomes to the outsider as deceptive and unreal as are the lath-and-canvas perspectives among which he walks. He does astounding things. I have known him at midday declare that a certain drama was the masterpiece of its century, that the one ambition of his life was to create its leading character; we have settled together the terms on which he would produce it and the principal items of its cast; and six hours later I have returned home to find the script of that same drama, neatly done up in a brown paper parcel, awaiting me on my desk, without one word of explanation. I have

been summoned in hot haste to a theatre by a telegram from the manager, and on my presence at the stage-door being announced, I have been informed that the manager was too busy to see me, but that, if I would state the object of my visit, he would write to me. I have been told by a manager that I did not possess, and by the direct ordinance of the Almighty could never hope to attain, the first faint glimmering idea of the dramatic art, and I have within a week of that utterance been employed by that self-same manager to revise the work of a veteran dramatist of many years' standing. Here be facts. And I am not adducing these facts as proofs of my claim to be regarded as the unluckiest of scribblers. They could be parallelled out of the experience of scores of other aspirants to stage honours; they are quite ordinary adventures, characteristic merely of the queer atmosphere in which all things theatrical are steeped.

That the manager—actor-manager or other—is almost invariably densely ignorant of the value of the goods in which he deals, might almost be allowed to go without saying. That statement is just as true of him as of every other sort of intellectual middle-man, the publisher, literary or musical, the picture-dealer, and the rest of the entire genus. It seems to be an eternal and immutable law that, directly a man begins to deal in the brains of other men, Providence deprives him of his own. If you asked the average intelligent man in the street how Mr. Pinero, or Mr. Barrie, or Mr. Bernard Shaw got upon the stage, he would tell you that it

is because they are men of distinguished capacity in the practice of the dramatic art. But that is not so. That Mr. Pinero has great natural gifts as a dramatist, that he is a born constructor, that he has a keen eye for traits of modern character, a great stock of verbal wit, a marked faculty for inventing telling situations, is true. That Mr. Barrie possesses similar gifts, *plus* a most exquisitely poetic sense of the infinite oddity, tenderness, and quaintness of the life about him, is true. That Mr. Shaw possesses an intellectual searchlight which goes like a Röntgen-ray through layer under layer of conventional trappings to the very bone of human nature, that he is the most truly individual and personal writer in England, and can express his wit and wisdom in strings of epigram unmatchable outside the pages of Voltaire, is true. These are the gifts which keep these men on the stage, but they had nothing whatever to do with getting them there. They stumbled on to the stage, precisely as Smith and Brown and Noakes and Stokes and Styles and Thompson, whose pieces are played to a crowd of clamorous deadheads on their opening nights and to empty benches for the rest of a fortnight's run, stumble on to it ; but, being the men of talent they are, they keep there, because the public recognise their talent and want more and more of their work. If one of these gentlemen were to write a piece more brilliant than the best he has yet produced and to send it on its rounds among the managers either anonymously or under a feigned signature, it would have no better chance of production than any other bundle of typewritten matter delivered at the stage-door by the

postman. Have I any need to produce proof of this allegation? Certainly not to any reader acquainted with theatrical history, but as I am writing for the general public and not merely for experts, I will jot down, almost at hazard, a few examples to illustrate it. When Mr. J. P. Burnett produced *Jo* at the Globe theatre thirty-five years ago, he offered on the night of production, before the curtain rose, to sell one-half of the entire rights of the piece for £50 cash, and the experienced manager to whom he made the proposal replied that he would not give him fifty pence for them. Three hours later the latter offered £2000, and was laughed at for his pains. With that admirable actress, Miss Jennie Lee, in the title part, *Jo* ran to record business in pretty nearly every country of the globe in which the English language is understood, and its success took more than five-and-twenty years to exhaust. I was present when Joseph Derrick offered the rights of *Confusion*, stock, lock, and barrel, for £20 to another manager. The offer was rejected. A week or two later, the piece was produced at a matinée at the Vaudeville, transferred at once to the evening bill, and ran for close on a year. Everybody—that is, everybody in the theatrical world—knows the pre-production histories of *Dorothy* and of *Charley's Aunt*. Everybody knows through what rejections, rebuffs, privations and hopes deferred Tom Robertson struggled to his all-too-brief enjoyment of recognition and success. Everybody knows how the plays of Mr. Somerset Maugham, which are now coining money in London, in the provinces, and in America and Australia, were hawked from hand to hand. It is

my fixed belief that Messrs. Pinero, Barrie, Shaw, Maugham, and the rest of the admirably accomplished band of our living dramatists, might have died of hunger on the streets with their dramas in their pockets, had they had no other means of gaining their daily bread; that they owe their success wholly and solely to the intelligence of the public; and that the production of their initial successes was as fortuitous as the spin of a coin or the roll of the marble in the roulette-wheel. Fate has been doubly kind to them—it first gave them their brains, and then directed the fluke by which they were enabled to exhibit them.

To come down to the bed-rock of fact, the actor is not, in the vast majority of cases, at all a clever man. Outside the particular faculties which fit him for the practice of his art he is, pretty generally, merely averagely intelligent, and in respect of general culture he ranks lower than any other class of artist. An actor who reads anything more intellectually stimulating than the daily newspaper or the trashiest kind of fiction, or who can sustain his part in general conversation among intellectual people, is a rarity in my experience. Here are one or two cases in point, which I could supplement to almost any extent. Some years ago a piece was produced at a certain West-End theatre, of which the action was supposed to take place in the reign of George I. The manager, who played the juvenile lead, had, accidentally—as it afterwards appeared—made up so precisely like Joseph Addison that it seemed almost as if the portrait of the great essayist had walked out of its frame in Holland House to appear upon

the stage. During an interval I went round to his dressing-room, and in the course of our conversation referred to this circumstance. "Addison," said my friend, "who was he?" "Addison of the *Spectator*," I explained. "I didn't know the *Spectator* was so old as that," said the manager. He thought I was referring to the contemporary critical weekly. I left the impression uncorrected, and talked of other things. Then occurred another quaint little incident. One of the young ladies in the company was sending round a "birthday album"—a volume containing a space for each day of the year, in which the friends of the owner might write their names and any "sentiment" or reflection that occurred to them. It was brought to my friend the manager open at the page containing the last contribution, that of the low comedian of the company, who, below his signature, had written, "An actor is a person who paints his nose and says he is somebody else." The manager, who was a great stickler for the dignity of the profession, was exceedingly angry at this. "Here, Murray," said he, "you're a literary man. Tell me something I can say in answer." "Let's give him a dose of Schlegel," I suggested. "Who the devil's he?" asked the manager. I explained that he wasn't anybody at present, having had the fortune—good or bad—to retire from this shifting scene some seventy years before, but that he had been a German philosopher and critic with a high appreciation of the functions of the drama. "Well, what did he say?" "He said, 'The theatre is the meeting-place of all the arts and all the philosophies.'" "That's devilish good!" said

the manager. "Thanks. I'll write that." He sat at his table, and a minute after looked up and asked, "How do you spell 'philosophies?'" A moment later he got his call to the stage, and he had hardly obeyed it when the peccant low comedian entered the room. I showed him what the manager had written. "That's *you*," said the low comedian. "I'll swear that —— never heard of Schlegel in his life. Give me a pen." And beneath the manager's quotation he wrote, "Yes—*but they meet in front of the curtain*," after which, his work on the stage being over for the night, he left the theatre. Perhaps he was wise in doing so, for the manager was a short-tempered person and a strong man of his hands. A great actress—I use the adjective advisedly, for I have seen few with a more delicate or convincing gift for the presentation of human emotion—once confided to me that she had never either seen or read the last act of one of Shakespeare's pieces, in the earlier scenes of which she had, an hour previously, drawn from me tears of sympathy, and had only the vaguest idea of how it ended. When, years ago, I went on tour with Miss Jennie Lee's *Jo* company, Miss Lee herself, her husband—the adaptor of the piece—and a young lady who played the part of "Esther Summerson" were the only persons in the crowd who had read the novel on which the play is based.

The conditions of the actor's life are so little calculated either to sharpen or to broaden his intelligence that one can hardly imagine a generally intellectual man enduring them for long together. To get by heart a certain number of words, to speak those words

in tones and accents prescribed by another person, and to repeat them and certain mechanical gestures —also learnt by rote—for a hundred, or five hundred, or, it may be, for five thousand nights in succession, is a stultifying process. The individual actors who have given proof of any distinguishing talent outside of the practice of the mere technique of the art by which they live can be counted on the fingers of one hand. With one or two notable exceptions they fail hopelessly where they might be supposed to find their best chance of success—in the writing of drama. Now and then one hears of an actor who writes, or paints, or models, or composes, and does it as well as the run of amateurs; but such cases are extremely rare. When an actor excels in any art outside his own it is generally as a performer on some musical instrument, an excellence requiring a talent cognate to his talent as an actor —as an exponent of the ideas and moods of other people. And these cases, insignificant as they are, are only the exceptions which prove the rule.

A man will, of course, be the better actor for possessing brains, but brains are no actual essentials of his outfit. Gifted with a handsome face, a trim figure, and the accent of a gentleman, he can play Romeo or Charles Surface to universal admiration, if coached by a stage-manager conversant with the business of the part. Endowed with a face like a gargoyle and a voice like a fog-siren, he can make an audience shudder over the brute malice of Caliban or laugh itself hoarse over the stupidities of Launcelot Gobbo, with only the faintest intellectual understanding of the character he pourtrays, or with none

at all. Physique is, indeed, nearly everything to the actor. The intellect of Shakespeare and the soul of Bayard, concealed in the fleshly envelope of the late Mr. Toole, or the living Mr. Penley, would fail to make them acceptable to an audience as "Hamlet" or "Othello." Phelps was a far more intelligent man, and a far better actor, than Stephen Kemble; but Kemble drew money as "Falstaff," because he had a big paunch and a naturally comic personality, and Phelps played the part to a handful of deadheads, because nature had stinted him in those respects. The rapid increase nowadays in the number of theatres renders an increase in the number of actors a necessity, and to-day scores of young fellows go on the stage, as, were that course not open to them, they would go into a City office or behind a retail counter, with no vocation and no enthusiasm, and with no education which would not better fit them to sell butter or calico than to interpret human thought and emotion. They are no more "artistic" by nature than the average shopwalker or the average clerk, and in general intelligence they are decidedly below the run of mechanics. To say that all actors answer to this description would be obviously false, but to say that it correctly fits ninety per cent. among them is rather an understatement than an exaggeration of the case. And, just as every conscript of the Grande Armée carried a shadowy Marshal's baton in his knapsack, so every member of this intellectually ragged regiment has it among his chances that he may one day become the lessee of a London theatre. It is from among their ranks that the lucky few who attain to

that eminence are drawn. And he would be a bold man who would declare that those happy individuals are always superior in general intelligence, or even in histrionic capacity, to the mass of their brother actors.

The process by which the actor is converted into the actor manager is simplicity itself. He serves his apprenticeship in London or the provinces, or both. As he gains in *aplomb* and technical skill he is entrusted with more and more prominent parts. At last Fate furnishes him with a part in which he makes a decisive score. The critics write about him, the illustrated papers publish his portrait, he is interviewed, talked about. He probably dresses well, and is socially presentable; he belongs, very likely, to a well-to-do family, or has wealthy connections; or, at those wonderful social menageries, the "smart" clubs, he has met and fraternised with the class of man who finds most of the money spent in theatrical speculation—gilded votaries of pleasure, young, middle-aged, and old, stockbrokers, company-promoters, and so on. He possesses, or "knows of" a play which contains a splendid part, a part which might have been written for him—a piece with barrels of money in it. He talks about it to his wealthy friends, and they catch enough of his enthusiasm to subscribe the necessary one or two thousand pounds for its production. It is produced, and one of two things happens. It fails more or less ignominiously, and the would-be manager falls back, for a period at least, among the smaller celebrities of the profession. Or it succeeds, makes a lot of money, and establishes the young actor as the

permanent manager of a theatre, and, *ex-officio*, as a judge of that form of literature which should be the highest and greatest, and is frequently, partly as a result of his influence, the most worthless and puerile.

The manager simple, who is not and never has been an actor, is a more wonderful product still, and only less worthy of study because, of late years, he has grown to be so rare. He is purely and simply a tradesman, and for the most part would not for a moment pretend to be anything else or anything more. He runs his theatre as his brother tradesmen run their shops, with the difference—rather an important difference when you come to think of it—that he is absolutely incapable of judging of the quality of the goods he sells. On many points of his business he is an expert. He knows what rent his landlord can fairly demand for his theatre. He knows how many supers it will take properly to "dress" his stage, the cost of properties and accessories, the holding capacity of his house, the amount of printing and advertisement necessary to draw attention to the show. His leading man would try in vain to bluff him out of an extra ten pounds a week, clever indeed would be the gallery check-taker who could long continue to cheat him of a tithe of that amount. He may be, in addition, an excellent stage-manager, with a keen eye for grouping and effect. You may add as many other qualifications as you can think of, but they are all rendered nugatory by the one fact that, like his friendly rival the actor-manager, he has neither the artistic sympathy nor the critical judgment to tell a good play from a bad one.

Ignorance is the mother of superstition, and the statement is just as true in the visible and tangible world as in the shadowy domain of the unseen. The manager cannot deny—he would pretty certainly do so if he could manage it with any decent chance of being believed—that in theatrical speculation failure is the rule and success the exception. He must perforce find some explanation for so patent a fact. The very simple—and perfectly true—explanation, that he is, in the vast majority of cases, a duffer and an ignoramus in the most important department of his own business has probably never occurred to him. In my thirty years of theatrical experience I have never once heard a manager explain a failure—of his own production—as due to a fault of his own judgment. Successive generations of managers have invented, bequeathed, and augmented a long list of feeble and futile superstitions regarding the causes of theatrical success and theatrical failure, superstitions which have passed so long unchallenged that they have hardened into the consistency of dogma. Here is a single instance, the type of many. Some years ago a certain manager of my acquaintance produced an (alleged) comic opera at a West-End theatre. It was beautifully dressed, faultlessly rehearsed, there was a crowd of popular artists in the cast, and the music was played by an admirable orchestra, admirably conducted. But there its virtues ended. Among many nights of boredom and disgust that night stands out in my remembrance. The book of the opera was a mountainous ineptitude. The scansion and the rhymes of its lyrics would have

attracted contemptuous notice in a collection of Catnach ballads. Its dialogue was pointless, vulgar drivel. It had no plot. Hisses were heard in the pit and catcalls in the gallery before the curtain had been up ten minutes, and they grew in a steady crescendo until the final fall of the curtain. A day or two later I met the manager, and he confided to me his theory of the damnation of the piece. It was the result of admitting the paying public on a first night. The opera was the best thing of its sort he had ever known in his experience, a gem of dramatic and musical art, and if he had only made certain of a favourable first-night verdict by confining admission to the personal friends of the author, the composer, the artists, and the management, it would have been a perfect gold-mine. The man who said this amazing thing was neither an escaped lunatic nor an inexperienced amateur. He had had years of theatrical experience, and tens of thousands of pounds had passed through his hands. And if the work he produced, and the excuse he urged for its failure, have remained all these years in my memory, it is only because they differed slightly in degree, and not at all in kind, from dozens of other examples of managerial imbecility.

Mr. Midshipman Easy, it will be remembered, went to sea in the hope of finding on the ocean that spirit of equality he had failed to find on land. It was in no similar delusion, that I might discover among theatrical managers an intellectuality indiscoverable among the publishing fraternity, that I left the concoction of novels for the manufacture of

drama—I already knew enough of the theatre to cherish no such dream. It was rather in the spirit which might have actuated some unlucky gentleman in the grip of the Inquisition, who, finding the monotony of the Scavenger's Daughter or the thumbscrew getting on his nerves, might have elected to try the rack as a change. I should be sorry to discourage budding genius, but I do not recommend any young littérateur to try the theatre as his first avenue to success. An unknown man *may* get a play accepted by a responsible management, but the chances are all against him. There is no royal road to acceptance by managers, but the best introduction to them nowadays is to have one or two successful novels to your credit. None of my books had ever really hit the public between wind and water, and, as I have already said, the luck which had dogged my literary ventures followed me across the threshold of the theatres. And, as I have already intimated, to hawk about a novel among publishers, disagreeable as it is, is a summer holiday compared to hawking plays about among managers. Should I ever find myself condemned to choose between doing that again and selling matches in the street, I shall elect for the latter, as vastly more dignified.

It occurred to me that I might perhaps find a private patron for my dramatic wares, and I entered on the search for him. But, like Falstaff—with a difference—I was not only unfortunate myself, but the cause of misfortune to others. The upas-like effect I exercised on the fortunes of certain publishers, as detailed earlier in these confessions,

extended almost invariably to such unfortunates as showed any symptom of helping me to succeed in my stage career. The first was H. C., a genial young gentleman who ran some sort of business—what, I never knew—which justified the renting of a palatial set of rooms with a half-acre of plate-glass frontage on the first floor of a house in Regent Street. He acquired a two-years' right of production in a comedy of mine, and promptly went through the Bankruptcy Court. My period of mourning for him was terminated by the appearance on my horizon of a stock-broker who had realised I don't know how much money by a daring operation in some sort of South African values. He rescued the comedy from H. C., and was in the act of engaging a company and negotiating with a certain suburban theatre for a trial week when the Boer War broke out. The last time I met him he was carrying a brown paper parcel, which he told me contained his dress clothes, and he appealed to me, as a person learned in such matters, as to the best establishment at which to hypothecate them.

Then J. W. "happened along," as the Americans say. J. W. was a remarkable person in more ways than one. To begin with, he was very much the biggest and heaviest man I have ever seen outside a booth, a Colossus who turned the scale at over thirty stone. He became possessed of the acting rights of a drama I had written in collaboration with Christie and Mr. John L. Shine. Within a few weeks of the completion of the bargain he was smitten with paralysis, and for nearly two years

ceased to count in the list of the living. The huge man was reduced to the condition of a helpless baby; he was washed and fed like one, and was oblivious of his nearest and dearest friends. A constitution as remarkable as his physique brought him through this terrible attack, and although he was condemned to walk on crutches, and was shrunk to a mere sketch and shadow of his former self, he regained his intellectual powers. Those powers were of no mean order, for after his recovery he invented a most ingenious secret process for the production of a substitute for a certain rare natural substance of great and rapidly increasing value, and, crippled as he was both physically and financially by his illness, succeeded in disposing of his patent in every civilised country in the world on such terms that he told me he felt positively frightened when he contemplated the extent of the fortune in his grasp. We took a strong mutual liking for each other. He asked to see some specimens of my individual dramatic work, and as a result promised me that he would, at the earliest possible moment, take a theatre and "run" me as a playwright. One day as we were lunching together at his office, he said, "I am going to Buenos Ayres next week, partly on business and partly for the sake of the voyage. I shall be away about eight weeks altogether. Make it an appointment to come here on the seventeenth of August, and we will settle things and get to work." I called on the appointed date, and found his secretary in the outer office. "Is Mr. W—— in?" I asked. "In!" echoed the secretary. "Yes—he's in his

coffin." He had fallen dead at his own table the previous evening.

Perhaps the richest specimen of my peculiar brand of luck in things theatrical was furnished by a game of spoof played for my discomfiture by Providence *à propos* of a melodrama produced by the Messrs. Gatti at the Adelphi some twenty years ago. I was at that time acting as dramatic critic of a certain London weekly, and received from my editor the voucher for a stall for the first night of the piece in question. I forget what I did on that especial evening, but there was metal of some sort more attractive elsewhere, and I gave the stall to a friend on condition that he wrote the notice for me. Twelve years later, Richard Mansell —another good fellow whose handsome face and cheery voice I can never hope to see or hear again—introduced Christie and myself to a theatrical speculator who gave us a tentative commission to write a play, whose action was to take place in the Klondyke region, a country through which Christie had travelled a year or two earlier, and where, as all the world will remember, huge deposits of gold had been discovered. We were to draw up a complete synopsis of the piece, to write the first act, and to submit them for approval. If they were satisfactory we were to receive £100 cash, and the same sum on the completion of the drama, "in advance of fees." Christie and I were both hard up, and we went for our task *con amore*, and completed it within ten days of our receipt of the commission. Christie read the act to Mansell and his principal, and as he read I noticed a growing

look of wonder on both faces, and a constant exchange between them of glances expressive of hopeless bepuzzlement. We had produced an actual replica of the first act of the melodrama I ought to have seen twelve years earlier. A Canadian farmer-family, reduced to the verge of ruin by a long battle with an ungrateful soil and a series of bad seasons, who had determined to throw up their farm and try their luck in newly discovered gold-fields ; a half-breed Spanish woman of vindictive temperament who had been cruelly tricked by a sham marriage ; a murder, witnessed by a low-comedy Cockney character ; and half a dozen minor figures and situations had all been faithfully reproduced from the older piece. The coincidence extended even to the name of our revengeful heroine, who in both dramas was christened "Quita." Both our auditors received our assurance of the purely accidental character of the resemblance with implicit faith—indeed, to doubt it would have been to stigmatise us, not as plagiarists, but as lunatics.

Let me bring this somewhat monotonous record to an end. Some five years ago I wrote a five-act drama, freely adapted from a French original. After hawking it about in the usual fashion among the managers, I submitted it to a young fellow with a taste for theatrical speculation, who offered me £50 for the entire British rights. I was—as my dramatic Macaenas was perfectly aware—so poor at the moment that I would have sold my teeth, which indeed were an almost superfluous possession, and I accepted his proffer. He did

nothing with the piece, and a year ago, thinking that I saw a chance of placing it elsewhere, I applied to him for a copy to offer to a London management. But the piece had vanished. My original MS. and four type-written copies had disappeared into space.

If I still cherished the faintest hope of success upon the stage, this public proclamation of myself as a dramatic Jonah would mark a depth of business ineptitude to which even my father's son might blush to sink. But I have said a last and long farewell to any such hopes, and so my avowal cannot hurt me.

Readers of "Monte Christo" will remember the delightfully pious reason given by the Abbé Faria for renouncing his attempt to escape from the Château d'If. Finding that he has a hundred yards of living rock to tunnel through, and no instrument but a toothpick with which to perform the operation, he concludes that his desire for liberty is contrary to the Divine Will. In a similarly devout frame of mind I finally relinquished my dream of dramatic fame.

It had been my intention, on reaching the end of this book, to round it off in proper orthodox fashion, with a flourishing peroration expressing my philosophy of life, and conveying a store of moral counsel to my readers. But now that the end is here, I do not feel in the least degree like doing it. So far as moral counsel is concerned, anybody who yearns for that may acquire a vast deal more of it than he is ever likely to translate

into practice by investing a penny in the purchase of a child's copybook. And as regards a philosophy of life, I make, on self-examination, the amazing discovery that I haven't any. Two years ago I could have labelled myself quite easily as a point-blank fatalist and pessimist. A fatalist I still am; I don't see how anybody who looks the facts of existence squarely in the face can be anything else. I came into the world by no motion of my own, the mathematically accurate result of preceding forces, and my original plasm has been shaped and moulded, developed, distorted, fed or starved, by an infinite plexus of circumstance with whose ordering I have had extremely little to do. I am also—academically—still a pessimist, inasmuch as it is my sincere conviction, based on such observation of the cosmos as I have been able to make, that the mass of pain exceeds the mass of pleasure; that neither the individual nor the race has any ultimate objective; and that the evolution of consciousness was a colossal blunder of some vast force outside the scope of human understanding. But I have no inclination to enlarge on those views at this moment.

The publication of this book will roughly coincide with the second anniversary of my wedding-day—the day on which I performed the only completely sensible and the only truly fortunate act of an otherwise quite curiously muddle-headed and, till then, conspicuously unfortunate existence. And my present, actual, workaday philosophy consists in enjoying the abundant harvest of happiness which has, by some paradox well-nigh as bewildering as it is

delightful, sprung up in the little seed-plot in the field of time which I had sown so liberally with nothing but tares and brambles. With what I think is a wise egotism I have come to recognise that, out of joint as the world may be, I do not suffer under the cursëd spite of having been born to put it right. A man who has arrived at fifty years of age with such faculties, physical and mental, as he ever possessed practically unimpaired, and whose immediate surroundings are tranquilly happy, may accept in all good faith and turn to sweet uses the bitter couplet of Dryden—

> "And from the dregs of life, hope to receive
> What the first sprightly running could not give."

If I presented myself to you as the Stepson of Fortune, and have continued so long to masquerade under that name, it was only that I might more completely enjoy your friendly surprise in taking my final leave of you in my actual character of her kind, if capricious Ladyship's prodigal, repentant, and reinstated Son.

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THE END

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